

TommyInnit's Declassified Vigilante Survival Guide

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TommyInnit's Declassified Vigilante Survival Guide

by [TheUntitledArtist](#)

Summary

“What kind of asshole robs a bakery?” Tommy shouted as he walked out in the open and made direct eye contact with the criminal.

The criminal just stared at him. At least the dude wasn’t shooting lasers at him.

“Damn, hate to break it to you but no amount of money can help you when you have an ugly face like that,” Tommy continued.

“Who the fuck are you?” The criminal asked, raising his eyebrows and ignoring Tommy’s absolutely hilarious quip.

“Isn’t obvious?” Tommy said, “I’m the guy that’s going to beat the shit out of you.”

“What the f—”

“Don’t care,” Tommy interrupted before punching the face of the sunglassesed villain.

or a story about a regular high school student turned into L'Manburg's newest (and coolest) friendly neighbor vigilante
aka just another dsmp superhero au okay lol

Notes

Hi! This is an update on Feb 27th 2024. I want to clarify that due to new information about some of the creators that these characters have been inspired by, this will be a stand alone fic. Please take these characters as original characters due to the fact that I do not support those creators. Thank you. :)

Rule #1: Quit Your Job

Chapter Notes

Hi, I've never done this before so please forgive me as I figure out how to do this. Lol please enjoy my random brain rot of just another dsmp superhero au.

"You did WHAT?"

Tommy lifted his phone away from his ear as his roommate's voice increased, probably going into a rant about how this was such an irresponsible act and how immature he was being, and how he was going to lose his scholarship, and he was going to get kicked out of school and so on and so forth. Tubbo was acting like Tommy had just cracked the screen of his favorite monitor with one of his favorite exclusive action figures. He rolled his eyes and waited until the voice quieted down before putting the phone back to his ear.

"Are you done?" Tommy asked, ignoring his roommate's initial question.

"I get it. You're fucking with me," Tubbo let out a dry laugh as he continued, *"Not funny, Tommy."*

"I'm not joking, Tubbo. I quit my job. Dream was being a bitch and I am a big man that is in control of his life and I quit. I did *not* get fired. They might try to tell you that I got fired but that is a lie and slander. I simply quit," Tommy replied, puffing out his chest and sticking his chin in the air with confidence even though Tubbo was not even remotely near him nor could see him.

Tubbo let out a snort, *"Ooooh that makes far more sense!"*

"I'm so glad you understand, Big Man, now I just got to explain it to the school board and that might be—"

"So you got fired," his roommate interrupted. *"That does seem pretty on-brand for you, Tommy."*

"What? No! I did not get fired! I just told you *I quit* out of my free will because I fucking love freedom and Dream hates freedom and also children," Someone let out a gasp behind him who turned to see a kid wearing an ugly bright green t-shirt with a white smiley face on it and he gripped an action figure with the same color scheme. His mother glared at Tommy as the kid's eyes began to fill with tears and an apologetic smile swept over his face.

He should probably refrain from insulting the Number One Hero. At least in public.

Once the kid started to cry, Tommy whipped around and speed-walked away as fast as he could.

“Was that a child crying? Seriously Tommy?”

“Don’t worry about it. That kid probably just knows how much of a jerk *L’Manburg’s Favorite Hero* is,” he frowned as he glanced up at the large billboard of the green Teletubby above the stairs that led down to the subway station. The words “THANK YOU HEROES” filled the rest of the billboard that wasn’t covered by the ugliest green known to mankind. Tommy made eye contact with the smiley face on the hero’s mask. It was mocking him.

“Bossman, six months ago you were so excited to even have the chance to talk to Dream. I get that being the assistant to the Number One Hero can be a bit boring, but what could have you done that got you fired?” Tubbo’s voice broke him out of the staring match with the billboard and he continued down the stairs.

“I didn’t get fired!” Tommy replied a bit too loudly and fellow riders on the platform started to step away from him. Lowering his voice, he continued, “I *quit* because I got a bad feeling being there. Plus that green color is vomit-inducing. How was I supposed to live, laugh, and love in those conditions?”

“Tommy—”

“It doesn’t even matter anymore,” Tommy interrupts, “and the point is that I don’t work there anymore! You’re acting like other jobs don’t exist! I don’t need to be the coffee runner to a bunch of stuck-up and overhyped losers in stupid costumes. I can still fulfill the requirements of my scholarship by just getting another job. And my next job is going to be even better than being a lame assistant!”

“Okay, so you have another job set up already?”

“Well, I don’t exactly have a specific job just yet,” his voice hesitated as an automated female voice rang in the air and he stepped onto the subway car, “but I was thinking maybe—”

“You better not say what I think you’re about to,” his voice was stern, ready to face the bullshit Tommy was about to drop.

“Pleaaassee Tubbboooo,” Tommy’s voice rose a few octaves as he whined into the phone and elongated the vowels in his roommate’s name.

“Absolutely not, Tommy! I am not risking my job and my scholarship just because you decided the vibes were off at your old job!”

“All you have to do is put in a good word for me to Sam! I’ll apply and everything myself! You won’t have to do anything!” Tommy gripped a handle that hung from the ceiling of the subway car as it made a stop. He had a few more stops before he would need to step off, meaning that he had plenty of time to convince Tubbo to get him a new job.

“Dude! I barely got the job myself! Why in the world would they take my recommendation for anything? Plus you don’t even enjoy working in labs! I’m currently tutoring you in biology!”

“But imagine Big T! We could work together! It would be so fun and we could like cure cancer or something and then get like medals of honor and then rub it in the face of the green booger hero!”

“Tommy we already live together, you really want to extend our time together that badly? You are soooo clingy—” Tommy could basically hear his sarcastic smile through the phone.

“I am not clingy! I am being practical! School is so much easier when we work together so I was just applying that logic to the other half of our Work-Study Scholarships! *I’m SO sorry* for being so smart and so intelligent and so strong and so—”

“Oh my Prime, you are so annoying. Fine! I’ll ask Sam if he has any positions open at the lab. Maybe they have like a janitor job open or something.”

“Jokes on you Tubbo, custodial work is good honest work. I’d rather keep our beautiful city clean than be Dream’s butler,” Tommy smiled as he hopped off the train. He knew he would be able to convince Tubbo because he was very convincing and such an awesome and cool and epic roommate—

“Pffff, you said butt,” Tubbo interrupted. And somehow Tommy was considered the immature one.

“Die,” Tommy had the best comebacks.

“Aww Tommy, I think you’re a great roommate too,” Tommy rolled his eyes as Tubbo continued, sarcasm drenching his voice, *“You’re such a great roommate that you’re going to grab a dozen donuts from Niki’s just for me? Wow, you’re such a wonderful friend! You’re like the bestest friend in the entire—”*

“Dude, Niki’s is like a whole extra ten minutes! Plus she’s probably run out of chocolate glazed so what’s the point?”

“Oh, I’m sorry? Do you have somewhere else to be, Tommy? Like a job? Wait no, you don’t have one of those.”

Tommy groaned.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Okay first get chocolate glazed. I guess if there’s none left then you can get—” Tommy lifted the phone away from his ear, letting Tubbo ramble about his favorite donut flavors.

“Just text me what you want, for the love of Prime,” Tommy spoke into the mic without lifting the phone back to his ear. His phone vibrated and he saw a text presumably filled with the donut order from Tubbo. Tommy lifted the speaker back to his ear, catching the end of a dragged-out thank you from his stingy roommate.

“Tell Niki I said hi too!”

“Alright, alright, I’ll talk to you soon Big Man,” Tommy said before stretching the phone away as Tubbo screamed a goodbye through the phone, almost taking out his right eardrum. After hearing the beeps of the end of a call Tommy slid his phone into his back pocket. He exited the underground, squinting in the afternoon sunlight and turning to go towards the best bakery in all of L’Manburg.

A bell lightly jingled as Tommy pushed open the door. His nose was immediately filled with the smell of freshly baked bread and warm chocolate chip cookies. A glass case displayed various perfectly baked goods, making Tommy’s mouth water. No, he had to focus. He forced his gaze away from the delicious blueberry muffins with that chunky sugar sprinkled on the top - oh that stuff is, dare he say, pog- he had a mission he had to complete.

Get chocolate glazed donuts.

“I’m sorry Tommy, we actually just ran out of chocolate glazed donuts,” The pink-haired baker gave him a soft sympathetic smile as Tommy planted his face in his hands and let out a defeated sigh.

“It’s not your fault, Niki, there’s no need to apologize. Honestly, I’m so glad to see your business doing well! I’m just thinking about how Tubbo is going to be complaining about it for the next twenty-four hours.”

“Did he have any other donut requests? We still have quite a few other flavors left, ya know?” She said as she gestured behind her to the wall-sized donut case. At this point, Niki’s superpower could be making baked goods appear out of thin air and Tommy would believe it.

Tommy pulled his phone out of his pocket and opened up Tubbo’s donut text. Woah this list was extensive. When did Tubbo become such a donut connoisseur?

“Uh, do you have any of these?” Tommy turned the phone screen towards Niki who immediately leaned in and began to read.

“Yes, we do! You will have to give me a few minutes though! I have to grab some of the fancier pastries from the back. Your roommate has expensive taste,” she laughed at Tommy’s groaning response to her last statement before disappearing behind the doors that lead into the back.

Tommy moved to the side as Niki’s coworker began to assist the person behind him. Just as he was about to slip his backpack off and sit down, his stomach made a gurgling noise. *Ah*. It seemed like the side effects of the three espressos from Free Coffee Bar on the first floor of the Headquarters he had downed before ditching Dream finally caught up to him.

Niki wasn't back with the donuts yet so Tommy decided to take care of his business in the meantime and headed towards the bathroom. Just as Tommy entered, his phone began to vibrate in his pocket.

"How am I considered the clingy one when you never stop calling me?" Tommy said as he answered the call from his incredible clingy roommate.

"I forgot to mention that I've been really craving Niki's blueberry muffins too! Could you pick up a few of those as well? You know the ones with the super good chunky sugar on the top?" Tubbo replied, not even acknowledging Tommy's question.

"Dude, you're going to have such a bad sugar rush if you plan to eat all of these today."

"I'm a growing boy and I need sustenance. Not to mention you owe me. I think I might have to pull an all-nighter for this extra credit project for Sam too."

"Why are you even doing extra credit for a class that you're acing?"

"Because I don't take my education for granted like some people I know."

"For your information, Tubbo, I actually love learning *so much*, so I have no idea who you are talking—" a loud crash beyond the bathroom door cut Tommy off. It was probably just someone dropping a plate or something. Just regular bakery sounds.

"I see that you ran out of comebacks, big man," Tubbo joked as Tommy heard another crash and screaming coming from the main part of the bakery. That did not sound like regular bakery sounds.

"Wait, Tubbo, I think there's something happening," Tommy lowered his voice as he slowly opened the door.

"Like a 'Niki giving us out donuts for free' something happening or—"

"Like a 'superpowered asshole is trying to rob the bakery and holding everyone hostage' something."

Rule #2: and become a vigilante

Chapter Notes

TW: violence and fighting

If there are any other warnings you would like me to put please let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy held the bathroom door open by a crack and scanned the scene. And not to be brutally honest, but it wasn't looking the best.

Glass-covered the floor from the broken display cases near the register and most of the customers were sitting in the corners of the bakery away from where the action was taking place. At the shattered counter the bakery-robber gripped the shirt of a guy who looked like he was going to start crying at any second. The robber wore an all-black outfit and had a shaved head, the only thing that stood out to him was his transparent blue and red glasses. He looked even more than an asshole than Tommy could have imagined. He was engaged in a heated conversation with Niki who stood in front of a wall of wrecked donuts -oh what a waste- covered in lines of dark burns.

"Tommy! What is happening?" Tubbo hissed into his ear. Tommy honestly forgot that he had been on a call.

"Maybe I can tell you if you shut up and let me listen!" He whisper-hissed right back.

"Now I don't think you want what happened to those donuts to happen to this guy right?" The bald asshole said as he leaned towards the guy he was holding and began to lift his glasses away from his eyes.

"Okay! You've made your point! What do you want?" Niki's voice held firm, but Tommy noticed her hands were balled into fists right under the counter. They were shaking.

The robber pushed his terrible eyewear back up his nose and replied with a sick smile, "Everything in the register and everything in that cute little safe you have in the back."

Niki hesitated, seemingly taken aback by the robber's statement.

"I-" she cleared her throat before continuing, "I don't have anything in the back, but I can give you all the cash--"

Suddenly a laser blasted into the wall behind her, causing the bakery to fill with screams. Niki let out a slight gasp as she grabbed her shoulder and more donuts fell off the wall behind her.

“Don’t fuck with me. You know exactly what I want and you’re going to give it to me, dear little baker.”

Niki scowled but stayed silent. She began to turn to go to the back room, but the robber grabbed her wrist.

“You know what? Why don’t we go with you?” So he said lifting up his hostage who whimpered in response. “Wouldn’t want you doing anything that could mix up the merchandise,” he said through a toothy smile.

Tommy slowly closed the bathroom door as he saw Niki lead the villain and poor customer to the back.

“Where the fuck are the heroes? They should be here already!” he whisper-yelled into the phone.

Loud typing came from the other side of the call before Tubbo’s voice came through, *“Police scanners are saying that they are about twenty minutes out. It doesn’t even say if a hero is coming.”*

“Bullshit! This lunatic will be gone by then! Someone has to do something *right now* !”

This had been going on for long enough. Niki was being brave, but she didn’t sign up for her bakery to be robbed. The innocent civilians in there didn’t sign up for their afternoon to be ruined by a crazy guy. Tommy definitely didn’t sign up to be sitting on the floor of a bathroom and helpless to help his friend. Even if he wanted to help, the law stated that only heroes with registered power licenses could use their powers in public areas. And all they could do is sit in fear until the heroes showed up.

“Tommy, I know this is frustrating, but it’s not like you can do anything. That guy is insane.”

For the past six months, he sat in Dream’s stupid office as the heroes would go do publicity stunts, barely actually helping anyone. There were people in trouble and all Tommy could do was sit and sort papers.

Maybe he couldn’t help people while he was under Dream’s thumb, but there were people in real danger right now and Tommy was sitting on the bathroom floor.

Well, Tommy was done sitting.

“You’re wrong, Tubbo. I can do something.”

“No. No, you can’t Tommy. This is not the time to play hero! There are innocent people in danger!”

“You’re right! There are innocent people in danger! But do you have a better idea, Tubbo? Please lay it on me!” Tommy pulled out his red sweatshirt from his backpack. Who would’ve guessed Dream’s cold-ass office building would come in handy now?

“Putting yourself in the line of fire isn’t a better option! It seems like he hasn’t actually hurt someone so just let the police handle this!”

“He hurt Niki. He shot her with a laser in the shoulder.”

Tubbo fell quiet as Tommy began to wrap a green bandana around his face, covering his mouth and nose. Randomly stealing stuff from his roommate was not something he expected to be thankful for as he got dressed to beat up a robber.

“Tubbo?” Tommy asked, checking if his roommate hadn’t fainted or something.

“Fuck him up.”

Tommy smiled as he lifted his red hood over his head. “Don’t worry, Big Man. I plan to.”

“The cops are fifteen minutes away. So whatever you are planning to do, you gotta do it fast, okay?”

“Sounds good, anything else on that scanner I need to know?”

“I don’t think so. Also if you die, I’ll kill you.”

“Alright, I’ll keep that in mind. I’ll call you back in less than fifteen minutes,” Tommy said before ending the call and cracking open the bathroom door again.

Nothing much had changed, there was still glass on the floor and all the customers were still cowering in the far corner of the bakery. The robber hadn’t returned from—

“See was that so hard?” The robber yelled as he kicked open the door to the backroom, still dragging his hostage. In his other hand, he swung around a dark gray briefcase. “Now just take all the cash out of the register and I’ll be on my way!”

A second later Niki came out, her head bowed and clutching her left shoulder.

Tommy felt his heartbeat in his ears. His face began to heat up but he couldn’t tell if it was due to fear, or the fact that he was so angry. All he knew was that he was done with this guy’s bullshit. Before he knew it, Tommy was kicking open the bathroom door, drawing all the eyes in the bakery towards him.

“What kind of asshole robs a bakery?” Tommy shouted as he walked out in the open and made direct eye contact with the criminal.

The criminal just stared at him. At least the dude wasn’t shooting lasers at him.

“Damn, hate to break it to you but no amount of money can help you when you have an ugly face like that,” Tommy continued.

“Who the fuck are you?” The criminal asked, raising his eyebrows and ignoring Tommy’s absolutely hilarious quip.

“Isn’t obvious?” Tommy said, “I’m the guy that’s going to beat the shit out of you.”

“What the f—”

“Don’t care,” Tommy interrupted before punching the face of the sunglassed villain.

Immediately the robber slammed to the ground as if an invisible crate of bricks had fallen on him. The guy who had been held hostage quickly scrambled away just as the villain let go of him as screams filled the bakery.

“Wh- what the fuck did you do to me?” the robber struggled to spit out as he flattened further into the ground.

Tommy calmly walked over and crouched down to pick up the gray briefcase the robber had previously been swinging around. The villain attempted to turn his head towards Tommy, but the invisible pressure was not letting up.

“I just messed with your gravity a bit. Don’t worry it’ll wear off by the time the cops get here,” Tommy turned towards Niki and handed her the briefcase. “I’m sorry about the bakery,” he tried to give her a sympathetic smile, forgetting about the bandanna covered half his face.

“I’m more sorry about all the donuts we lost, truly a sad loss,” Niki joked. Tommy noticed that her hands were still shaking.

“Seriously, do you need help cleaning-“ his head whipped towards the front window as he was interrupted by the sounds of distant sirens.

“Thank you for your help, but you should go,” Tommy’s attention came back to Niki as she spoke up again. “I’m guessing from your whole get-up that you might not have a good interaction with the police if they ask about a powers license?” Niki said with a raised eyebrow.

Tommy laughed nervously.

“Oh no! I definitely have one of those! I just left it at home!” Tommy lied. Good thing Tommy was very good at lying. He was absolutely epic at it. “Yep! It’s at home in my desk drawer because I most definitely have a powers license!”

He put his hands up in defense as he glanced around at the people around the bakery. It seemed like they had relaxed a bit since the robber was now stuck to the ground, but they were all still staring wide-eyed at him.

Tommy awkwardly smiled before slowly turning away.

“Mhm, sure,” Niki replied before lowering her voice, “there’s an exit through the kitchen. You can grab some extra pastries before heading out. You don’t want to leave your roommate hungry, right?”

Tommy’s eyes went wide, Wait-”

“Goodbye guy in a red sweatshirt!” Niki started to speak up, as she made eye contact with the patrons who were still on the ground. “Thank you for all your help! I hope you find your power license soon!” She winked before discreetly gesturing at the kitchen door.

“Oh! No problem! Goodbye civilians!” Just as he finished his sentence he saw police cars pull up to the bakery. That was definitely his cue to leave.

Tommy kicked the robber one last time and the robber grunted as Tommy reinstated a heavy pull of gravity on him. He gave a small wave to Niki before grabbing his backpack and ducking into the kitchen to make his escape into the back alley.

“And you’re sure no one recognized you?” Tubbo sat back in his chair, crossing his arms and furrowing his eyebrows together.

“I wasn’t even in the bakery for that long before that asshole decided to rob the place! Plus your bandana is great for hiding identities,” Tommy replied as he threw the bandana at his best friend’s face.

“When did you even take— you know what I don’t care. I’m just glad I don’t have to use my latest paycheck to bail you out of jail.”

“Aw, Tubbo, were you worried about me?”

“I’m calling the police,” he said, lifting up his phone.

“Nope!” Tommy lunged over grabbing Tubbo’s phone and slamming it on his desk before giving his roommate a sinister smile.

“Tommy! What the hell!” Tubbo pushed the phone after realizing that he couldn’t lift his phone from the desk like someone had superglued it down. Or more like his dumb roommate had used his dumb gravity powers to increase the dumb gravitational pull on his phone.

“No more phone for Tubs.”

“I liked you better when you thought you were powerless.”

“You didn’t say that when we made all of Mr. Soot’s pens stick to the ceiling.”

Tubbo glared at Tommy before a small smile pushed its way onto his face, “Do you remember how red his face got when he realized it?”

“And then he tried to get them off by standing on his desk and then the Headmaster walked in!” Tommy laughed in reply.

It wasn't before long Tubbo burst out laughing too and the two of them fell onto the plain bed in the corner of the room.

"Wait, why do we have a third bed in our room?" Tommy asked as he finally got over his laughing fit.

"Oh yeah! I was going to tell you because I know you never check your email which you really should do that by the way, boss man, but then you kind of quit your job and then stopped a robber while also breaking the law—"

"Tubbo, I know many things happened today, get on with it," Tommy interrupted, crossing his arms.

"Sorry! It's good news though! We're getting a new—" He was interrupted again, but this time by a knock at the door. "I didn't realize it was five already!" He jumped up and ran towards the door, swinging it open.

Standing in the door frame was a tall, lanky boy with half of his hair white and the other half black. His mismatched colored eyes were wide and he was hunched over gripping a duffle bag that matched his hair as if he was trying to make himself smaller, but it wasn't working (he was definitely taller than Tommy but Tommy would never admit that).

"You must be Ranboo!" Tubbo excitedly greeted the visitor. He turned towards Tommy and said, "This is who I was going to tell you about! We have a new roommate!"

"We have a new what?" Tommy asked in disbelief.

Why would they need a new roommate? There was barely enough room to walk around in the closet that they called a dorm room. And Tubbo and Tommy were such a good pair! Adding a new person would just ruin the whole vibe of their dynamic! Not to mention Tommy felt like this new guy had weird vibes.

Ranboo focused his eyes on the ground, actively avoiding Tommy's stare. It seemed like he was trying to make himself even smaller by pulling his shoulders up to his ears, but really wasn't working. Tommy knew they would not get along.

Tubbo scoffed, turning back towards Ranboo, "Ignore Tommy, he just got fired so he's in a pissy mood. Please come in!" Tubbo continued as he grabbed the tall boy's bag.

"I did not—" Tommy yelled as he jumped up in response only to be interrupted by the black and white duffle bag being thrown at his face.

"Don't you have to have a job to be a part of the work-study program here?" asked the two-toned-haired boy in a quiet voice.

"I did not get fired! I quit. No one fires Tommy Kraken Danger Innit," Tommy responded, completely ignoring the question.

"Same difference. You're still unemployed," said Tubbo, rolling his eyes.

“That can’t seriously be your name,” Ranboo whispered under his breath as he gave the blond a confused look.

Tommy started to open his mouth to give a very pog comeback, but Tubbo pushed past him to allow Ranboo to finally step into the room.

“I’m Tubbo by the way! My roommate may not seem like it, but we’re glad you’re here,” then Tubbo raised the box of donuts that Tommy had earlier risked his life for. “Would you like one?”

Just because Tommy brought those for Tubbo didn’t mean he could just hand them out to strangers!

“Uh…” Ranboo’s voice trailed off as he noticed Tommy glaring at him once again. “I’m okay. I’m not hungry.”

“Okay! Let us know if need anything else!” said Tubbo, putting the box down and turning away from the new roommate.

Ranboo nodded in understanding before he began to unpack his things on the new bed. Tommy was just analyzing Ranboo’s every move as Tubbo pulled him towards their bunk beds in the other corner of the room.

“Tommy! What are you doing? You keep staring at the dude like he’s a criminal or something!” Tubbo angrily whispered once they reach the other side of the room.

“He may as well be! He is invading my personal space!” Tommy replied, glancing over his most favorite roommate’s shoulder to scowl at his least favorite roommate.

Tubbo pulled Tommy’s attention back to him and whispered, “I get that this isn’t the most ideal situation, but it’s not his fault! Just try to get to know him before deciding that you hate him.”

“I never said I hate him, Tubbo. I just think his hair is lame, he’s very average-sized, and I bet that I could beat him in an arm-wrestling match—”

“Tommy,” Tubbo interrupted him with a serious voice.

Tommy sighed in resignation, “Fine. But I just feel that we’re not going to like each other.”

Tubbo began to reply, but Tommy was already moving past him towards the new member of dorm room #420.

“So Ranboob, since you love being nosy about our jobs, what’s your job anyway?” Tommy asked, breaking Ranboo’s attention away from his unpacking.

“My name’s actually Ranboo—”

“Don’t care,” Tommy let out a small yelp as Tubbo dug his elbow into Tommy’s ribs. “Sorry, Ran- *boo*,” emphasizing the last syllable as he eyed Tubbo who returned a stern look.

“It’s fine,” he answered in a quiet voice as Tommy returned to looking at the new roommate. “And about my job, I actually got placed today.”

“Oh really? Congrats, boss man! I totally understand the pain of having to wait to get accepted into this program, let alone getting placed,” Tubbo exclaimed as he gave the tall teenager a celebratory bump with his elbow.

Tommy stifled a laugh before chiming in, “I still remember the squeal he let out when he got placed.”

“I was excited! I had been waiting for *six months!*” Tubbo defended.

Tubbo had applied for L’Manburg Visions Academy twice before he had even gotten an interview to the country’s most prestigious private boarding schools. His scholarship paid for most of his expenses, but being able to work at Pandora’s Laboratories with THE Awesamdude was all Tubbo could ever want.

Tommy, on the other hand, had entered the Academy’s Scholarship Lottery on a whim after hearing that the winner could potentially work with the Number One Hero of L’Manburg. A few months later he was placed in a job at the Heroes’ Headquarters.

And then Tommy got fired quit. But that was not here or there.

“So where did you get placed, Ranboob?” Tommy yelled after Tubbo kicked him in the shin. “Ehem, sorry, *Ranboo*.”

Ranboo awkwardly laughed, “It’s okay. I got placed as an assistant at the Heroes’ Headquarters.”

Tommy crossed his arms in a huff as Tubbo let out a laugh. The new guy even has a boring job. Tommy was so smart for quitting his lame job and he bet that the office was a mess without his presence. Dream was probably being a piss baby right now.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to laugh at you,” Tubbo clarified. “It’s just ironic because—OW!”

This time it was Tommy’s turn to elbow Tubbo in the ribs.

“Which one?” Tommy asked, making direct eye contact with Ranboo.

Ranboo quickly looked towards the ground and responded, “sorry, which what?”

“Which hero are you working with?” Tommy repeated, crossing his arms.

Ranboo looked up at him with a sheepish smile, “Oh! I’m going to be Dream’s new assistant.”

Hopefully, I can get chapters out often but also I am widely known as being super inconsistent lol

Hope you enjoyed! Here are some places you can follow me if you want to see my art and other ramblings of this au!

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Rule #3: Hate Men and Beat up Bad Guys

Chapter Summary

tw: fighting and stuff (let me know if I need to tag anything else!)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Pst! Tommy!” a voice hissed at him. Tommy sat up in a start and turned to see Tubbo looking at him wide-eyed and pointing to the front of the class.

“Well, it is nice of you to finally join us, Thomas,” Mr. Soot said as he crossed his arms and leaned back onto his desk.

Shit. He had fallen asleep in English again.

Tommy awkwardly laughed as he felt the eyes of the rest of the class fall on him. He quickly scanned the whiteboard behind Mr. Soot’s large annoying head. The board was filled with barely decipherable writing talking about the thematic implications of the boat of some dude named Odysseus.

Tommy would have been so ready to answer any of Mr. Soot’s questions if he had read the assigned reading last night. However, he had been a bit busy last night with... his new afterschool enrichment activity.

Specifically last night, he stopped three car thieves and then chased an old lady’s cat for an hour and a half before it ran up a tree and when Tommy tried to float the cat down, the dumb clawed monster ruined the green bandana that he definitely did not steal from Tubbo again. Tommy did not hate the cat, but the cat almost revealed his identity! And after he spent 45 minutes trying to get it off the fire escape! He risked his life for—

“I’ll repeat the question, Thomas, what are Odysseus’s fatal flaws?”

That stupid cat was going to be the reason Tommy failed English.

“Well, isn’t Odysseus’s fatal flaw that he thinks he is smarter than everyone else?” Tommy replied, answering a question with another question.

“You could say that, yes.”

“Wait! Isn’t this that same guy who had sex with his mom? If I have to say that is a pretty big fatal flaw! Final answer: his fatal flaws are that he is gross and has a god complex.”

Mr. Soot stood in silence and Tommy could feel his scholarship go down the drain.

Suddenly Mr. Soot burst out laughing.

Tommy sat frozen. He was doomed. Mr. Soot was laughing at his failures. He should probably start thinking about where he could live after being kicked out. Oh, Tubbo would be so lost without him and he would be so sad—

“It’s nice to know that even when you’re not paying attention, you’re at least learning a bit.” Mr. Soot said as he finished laughing. “However, you did get a bit mixed up. Odysseus is not the one who married his mom. That was Oedipus who we learned about last month. Odysseus definitely has problems of his own, but you are correct in the fact that he thinks he is smarter than everyone else. This flaw is what gets him cursed in the first place. He is prideful and boastful and this sometimes helps him but also it is what causes him problems. Thank you, Thomas, for your contribution.”

Mr. Soot then continued to talk about the connections between themes and characters as Tommy sank into the back of his chair in relief. He glanced over at Tubbo who was giving him a thumbs up. Tommy replied with a strained smile before the bell rang and everyone began to pack up.

“Well, that was awful,” Tommy groaned, flinging his backpack on.

“Look on the bright side! It definitely could’ve gone worse,” his optimistic roommate replied.

“Thomas, could you talk to me before you leave?” Mr. Soot said from his desk. Tommy glared at Tubbo as snuffled a laugh.

“Good luck, big man. You got this! Maybe it’s good news!” Tubbo said before leaving Tommy alone to deal with one of the world’s most terrifying beings: a tall sweater-vest-wearing English teacher.

“Uh, you said you wanted to speak to me?” Tommy asked as he walked to the front of the class.

“Yes,” Mr. Soot said, looking up from his stack of papers. “I just wanted to check in with you.”

“That’s it? Well, you will be pleased to know that I am totally fine and there is nothing to be worried about! I am totally fine and will continue to be the most cool and pog student you will ever meet!”

“Ah yes, because cool and pog students regularly fall asleep in the middle of class and get fired from their jobs.”

“I did *not* get fired! I quit! And I wasn’t *technically* sleeping in your class! My eyes were just closed for a period of time that cannot be confirmed or denied!”

“My mistake. You are a cool and pog student who quit your job even though your scholarship is a work-study-based scholarship in which you need a job to fulfill the requirements?”

Tommy paused for a moment, trying to decide how deep he should keep on digging this hole he had found himself in.

“Listen, Thomas. It’s fine that you left your previous position, but it’s also been a few weeks now and the administration has asked me to check in on your job search. Have you even been looking?”

Tommy stared at the floor. It wasn’t that he *hadn’t* looked for a new job. He was just busy with his new hobby! He was still doing his old job of cleaning up the neglected messes of superheroes but now with some more punching.

But also he couldn’t really put “vigilante” down as a job title.

“I’ve been working on it,” he answered, admiring the speckled patterns of the floor tiles.

“You’re a smart kid. And even though you sometimes fall asleep in my class, I believe you deserve to be here. Don’t give the school a reason to say you don’t.”

Mr. Soot then handed him a paper with the school’s name decorated at the top, “You have five days to get this signed by your new employer.”

“What? Five days? That’s not enough time!” Tommy protested.

“Well, you did say you were already looking, correct? So it shouldn’t be a problem,” Mr. Soot replied with a stupid smirk on his face.

Tommy scowled in response as Mr. Soot continued, “Get your new boss to sign this and bring it back to me. Otherwise, your next conversation will be with the headmaster.”

“Fine, but this is stupid.”

“I believe in you, Thomas. You’re a bright young man. Any place would be lucky to have you as an employee. Just don’t sleep there as much as you sleep in my class.”

Tommy rolled his eyes as he stuffed the paper into his backpack and headed out of the classroom, “You can just call me Tommy, by the way. Thomas was the name they gave me when I was in the system.”

“Have a good rest of your day, Tommy.”

After school, Tommy did some serious thinking about his job search. Or also called “ignoring the problem by being an illegal vigilante.”

The wind whistled in his ears as he bounced from rooftop to rooftop. He focused on decreasing his gravity as he jumped and increasing it again right before he landed. He was slowly getting better at using his powers for travel and he had fallen off more than enough buildings in these past few weeks. He had the bruises to prove it. However, bruises were the last thing on his mind as he jumped along with the rhythm of the momentum of gravity.

One, two, three, less – the cold air cut through the bandana that covered his smile– *four, five, six, more* – the gravel crunched under his shoes as he stumbled to recenter and continued to run towards the edge- *one, two, three, less* – the wind made his eyes water as he gazed towards the peach sunset that filled the sky as he floated towards the next rooftop. Oh if he could just do this all day instead of worrying about the trials of being a student in the L’Manburg education system.

Suddenly a gunshot rang through the air, followed by screams. A few weeks ago gunshots and screams would have made Tommy fast-walk in the opposite direction. However, Tommy’s vigilante urge nowadays made him run toward places with a high probability of violence.

This evening's location with a high probability of violence was a dark alleyway where a man in a poorly made ski mask was pointing a gun at a woman.

“Just hand me everything in your wallet! Can you hear me, bitch?” the man yelled and the woman began to rifle through her purse.

He quietly floated down behind the man and when the woman looked up eyes grew big as she saw him, but Tommy put his finger to his lips.

“Excuse me, sir,” Tommy said as he tapped the man's shoulder.

The man gave a high-pitched scream and jumped at the new voice, now pointing the gun at him.

“Woah! Didn’t mean to scare you,” Tommy raised his hands in defense.

“Who are you?”

“I came to help you! I heard a scream and I came as fast as I could. I thought at first it might have been this lady that screamed, but honestly, from the scream you just gave, it is clear now that it was yours! Plus it seems like you’re distressed since you’re holding a gun at this defenseless but clearly very dangerous lady. I completely understand the difficult position you’re in.”

The man stared blankly at Tommy, slowly processing what he had said. Criminals are just awful at picking up sarcasm. Maybe Tommy should lead in with a joke next time?

“I do not scream like a lady!” the man yelled, the gun shaking in his hands. “And what the hell are you talking about? I’m in the middle of a mugging! I do not need help!”

“Dude, there’s nothing wrong with having a feminine scream. Come on, you need to fight your inner toxic masculinity. And there’s no harm in asking for help. Like your gun is so heavy it’s causing your hands to shake! Please allow me to help you with that!”

“Wha-” The man began, but Tommy didn’t let him finish. In a swift move, Tommy tapped the gun and immediately increased its gravity pull. Suddenly the man was flung down from the new weight of the gun.

“Oh whoops. Silly me! I increased its weight instead of decreasing it. I am so sorry! Here, let me correct my mistake.”

He kneeled down and tapped the gun again, this time decreasing its gravity and the gun began to float up as if it was a helium balloon.

“What the hell?” The man yelled, watching the gun levitate into the sky.

“Neat party trick, right?” Tommy replied before kicking the man back into the brick wall. The man stuck to the wall and struggled to move before realizing that he couldn’t.

“What the hell did you do me?”

“You’re going to stay there and think about your actions,” shaking his finger at the criminal like he was disciplining a child. Well, most criminals that Tommy fought ended up having the common sense of a five-year-old so he wasn’t too far off.

The man began to scream profanities as Tommy turned toward the lady.

“Are you okay? Did he hurt you?” Tommy asked.

The lady shook her head in response, avoiding eye contact with him.

“Good. I’m glad you’re okay. I would recommend calling the police now so they can come pick up this scumbag. My powers will wear off by the time they get here. Are you alright to walk back home alone?”

She nodded, still avoiding eye contact.

“Alright, I’m going to head out then!” he said as he began to float towards the roof, “I sure hope that gun doesn’t hit anyone on the head though when it falls from the sky.”

He heard the lady let out a soft giggle as he turned away.

“I am glad that they finally assigned a hero to Logstedhire. Thank you.”

“Oh, I’m no hero!” he replied with a hidden smile, “I don’t need a fancy title from stuck-up businessmen to help people. I’m just your friendly neighborhood vigilante.”

—

Tommy laid down on the top of a building with feet dangling as he stared at the sky. The peach-colored clouds were slowly being overtaken by the deep blue of the evening. The stars began to slowly light up just as the few street lamps did below him.

He smiled as he began to try to identify the different constellations that filled his sight. As much as he complained about having to attend a glorified prison, he was glad that he was able to go to Visions Academy. The classes were stupid hard, but he got to be with his best friend and had a roof over his head. That's all he could really ask for. However, since Visions was located directly in the middle of Central L'Manburg and with the great blessing of light pollution, he could never see the stars there.

In Tommy's opinion, Logstedshire had always been the best place to see the stars.

His stargazing was interrupted by the vibration of his phone. He sat up to find a new notification from the police scanner. Someone had tripped a silent alarm at a warehouse near the port between Logstedshire and the Badlands. Then he noticed the time. Oof. It was getting late and he still had to finish his math homework...

But it wouldn't hurt to catch one more bad guy? Right?

He gave his arms a quick stretch before taking in the stars one last time and headed towards the warehouse.

The first thing Tommy noticed when he landed on the warehouse roof was the sounds of the waves. The waters were extremely rough and were crashing into the pier with no pause. He guessed the thief thought they would be safe under the cover of night and waves. Well, there is no cover from the fist of justice. Oh, that's good. He'll have to write that one down later.

Tommy slid in through a skylight and slowly lowered himself onto one of the support beams that crisscrossed across the top of the building. Now away from the sounds of crashing waves, he was greeted with voices coming from a storage crate below him.

"Aren't we supposed to be doing his job quickly?" a deep voice complained.

"I'm going as fast as I can!" a second voice snipped back. "Maybe if someone had read the job description he could have actually done something to prepare."

"Honestly, I don't even know what I'm doing here. There wasn't even anyone to fight," the first voice replied.

"Not every job requires fighting people, Blade. You need to learn other skills."

"I'm a simple man, I like fighting," said Blade (Tommy presumed) in a monotone voice.

“Fighting is not always-” the second voice started, but he was cut off.

“Shockwave,” a third voice entered the conversation, “stop arguing with Blade and focus on breaking open the safe. I don’t want to have to cut your hand off because you got it stuck in the safe again.”

“Very funny joke, Angel. You wouldn’t cut off my hand,” Shockwave lightly chuckled, but was met with silence.

“You are joking? Right?” Shockwave said, now in a more worried voice.

“I’m not opposed to cutting off his hand if he’s being stupid,” Blade chimed in.

“Just focus and then we won’t have to get to that topic,” Angel replied.

“I hate both of you,” Shockwave grumbled.

Tommy had no desire to fight three unknown enemies in a storage crate so he decided to wait until they came out to deal with them. The band of merry thieves continued to bicker to the point that Tommy was about to doze off listening to their useless conversations, but he snapped to his senses as he heard them begin to exit the crate.

The three men were continuing to bicker as they entered Tommy’s view. They all wore dark clothing and masks with the exception of one who also wore bright red goggles over his eyes. Tommy couldn’t tell who’s voice belonged to who from the support beams, but he noticed that the one with red goggles was holding two silver briefcases. Bingo.

Tommy sprang from the beam and quietly landed behind the group of thieves. But the moment he touched the ground, the man in the red goggles stopped in his tracks.

“There are no heroes assigned to the docks tonight,” said the man with the voice that Tommy recognized as Shockwave. Then he slowly turned to face Tommy, followed by the other two. “So who are you?”

“Who am I? Who are *you* ? Who are *we*? Aren’t these the questions we’re all trying to answer in this crazy world?” Tommy said with a shrug. Maybe could just defeat these guys by giving them all an existential crisis.

Suddenly the man to the left of Shockwave jumped at Tommy with a sword. A sword? Seriously? Where was this dude keeping a whole sword? Tommy leapt out of the way, dodging the swordsman’s attack. Guess the existential crisis plan will be put on the back burner.

Tommy began bouncing around the swordsman's strikes, actively trying to avoid becoming a shish kabob. Tommy enjoyed not being a shish kabob, but it seemed like his assailant did not share the same sentiments.

“I hate the ones that never stay still,” he grunted. “This will go much faster if you just stop moving.”

“I appreciate the fact that you want to be efficient, but I also like having all my limbs,” Tommy replied.

From the corner of his eye, Tommy noticed that the other two men began to lift up towards the sky light. Did that guy have wings? Who were these weirdos?

“You seem delightful and as much as I like hanging out with you, it seems like your friends need my attention,” Tommy said as the swordsman lunged the sword towards him. Tommy jumped up and sprang off the man’s back, making him fall face first onto the ground and launching toward the flying thieves.

Tommy crashed directly into them and made the winged man swerve. He clutched onto the wings and began to increase the gravity and drag the three of them back to the ground.

“What the hell are you doing? Let go of us!” yelled Shockwave.

“If you say so!” Tommy enthusiastically replied and let go of the wings. He began to slowly float as the other two villains dropped back to earth. The two of them landed back on the floor of the warehouse with a *THUD*.

“Oh my Prime! I just got it!” Tommy exclaimed. “That one guy is named Blade because he has a sword and this guy is named Angel because he has wings! Seems a bit on the nose in my opinion. Wait, so why are you called Shockwave? Maybe you can make people wave at you? That’s a bit lame.”

Shockwave groaned, “Do you ever shut *up*?”

On his last word, Tommy was suddenly flung back by an invisible force. Pain shot up his back as he hit a shipping crate across the room. He was definitely going to feel that in the morning.

“Ohhh,” Tommy moaned in pain. “Waves. Like sound waves. That makes way more sense.”

Shockwave laughed and replied, “It technically has to do more with vibrations, but believe whatever you want, *kid* .”

Tommy didn’t hate many things. He *disliked* a majority of things, but he did not *hate* anything. Except for three things: men, losing, and being called “a kid.”

And this annoying ass criminal was a man who had just called him “kid.”

Tommy sure as hell was not going to let him win.

As he slowly got up he pressed his palms into the shipping crate behind him. The crate groaned as it started to lift into the air.

“Well, the *vibrations* coming from your mouth are getting on my fucking nerves,” he said before launching the big ass crate directly at the red goggled villian.

CRASH!

Shockwave barely dived out of the way before the crate slammed into the wall behind him and the villain whipped his head back and forth between the crate and Tommy.

“Did you just throw a shipping container at me?!” he shouted as the wall began to crumble next to him.

“It *technically* has to do more with gravity, but you can believe whatever you can want, *you glorified megaphone*,” Tommy replied with a smirk spreading across his covered face.

“You SON OF A -” but Shockwave was cut off by him being lifted into the air.

“We’ve been here too long,” said Angel. “Someone called in the crash and the police are on their way. Blade, grab the briefcases.”

“Angel! Let me go! I need to KILL that CHILD!” Shockwave yelled, trying to fight against the Angel’s grip.

Ignoring the annoying screams of Shockwave, Tommy bound his gravity towards the briefcases and flew (more accurately, he fell) towards the briefcases. However, Tommy was a second too late and his fingertips barely brushed the briefcases before Blade grabbed the handles and began to run towards the exit.

Luckily, for Tommy, a touch was all he needed. Focusing his powers on the briefcases, he increased their gravity and Blade was flung forward as the cases adhered to the ground.

“This is getting annoying,” Blade mumbled as he yanked on the cases.

“Leave them! Let’s go!” yelled Angel who was flying towards the skylight with a grumpy Shockwave in tow.

Blade shrugged and quickly began to parkour up the walls and beams towards Angel then grabbed his hand. The three criminals broke open the skylight and flew away just as Tommy began to hear the police sirens over the waves of sea. Honestly, that was also Tommy’s signal to head out as well since he was still a whole illegal vigilante and all.

Even though Tommy could travel by rooftop, he ended up back at his dorm much later than he anticipated. As he approached Visions, his room was dark and felt a weight lifted off his chest. Tubbo and Ranboo had gone to bed. He was in the clear.

Keeping his crime-fighting hobby a secret from Tubbo for the past few weeks had been difficult. It wasn’t that Tommy enjoyed lying to him. To be honest, there were so many times Tommy wanted to tell him about how he had kicked the butt of criminals and thugs, but Tommy knew better. After the bakery incident, Tubbo became paranoid that the police were

going to pop out of any alleyway and arrest Tommy. Or worse, Tommy could be *expelled* from Visions.

Little did Tubbo know that Tommy was already on track for expulsion and all without being exposed as an illegal vigilante. Tommy didn't want to stress Tubbo out with his side hobby. He deserved to go to bed without wondering if his best friend was going to come back every night.

As for Ranboo... Tommy did not care for his other roommate. Not when he could report Tommy directly to Dream for breaking the law.

Tommy held his breath as he slowly slid open the window. He tried to peer into the dark room, checking for any signs of movement. Once the close was clear, he swung one leg through the window and let out a sigh of relief.

CLICK.

Tommy's eyes went wide as the room lit up.

"It's kind of late to be looking for a job, isn't it?"

Chapter End Notes

Hi,,,,,, it's been a while hasn't it,,, life got in the way,,, I'm going to be more consistent! Hopefully! I have a fun story I want to tell I just need to get into the swing of things!

please forgive any typos rip

Thank you for reading!

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Rule #4: It's Okay to Call Tech Support Sometimes

Chapter Notes

I don't think I need to put a trigger warning for anything besides a little fight scene at the end!

Hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“It’s kind of late to be looking for a job, isn’t it?”

The one chair in their dorm room turned around and Tommy faced Tuboo with his arms crossed; his eyebrows raised.

“Tubbo! Big—” Tommy fell through the window, landing on his face. He jumped back up without missing a beat and continued “T! How are you?”

“How are *you*, Tommy?” Tubbo said as he leaned back into the chair.

“I’m great!” Tommy let out a forced laugh. “The job hunt has been just super hard lately, you know, the economy and stuff.”

“Actually, Tommy, it seems like I don’t know much about your job hunt. Please enlighten me.”

“Oh, Tubbo, I don’t want to keep you up all night and talk your ear off about my super boring job interviews! It’s really nothing special—”

“No.”

“Wha—”

“No, I would love to hear all about,” Tubbo leaned forward and his eyes darkening, “*the super boring job interviews.*”

Shit.

Tommy wiped his sweaty hands on his pants as he broke eye contact with his roommate. “Well to make a long story short, I went into different places, talked to boring suit guys, and left. I guess they’ll call me if I got the job. See, boring.”

Tubbo let out a sigh and Tommy looked back up at him turn towards his computer.

“If you’re not going to talk about your night, I guess I will talk about mine,” Tubbo stated in a monotone voice. “I was having a good night in assuming my best friend was just out late again. But then I was looking through the news when I saw the weirdest thing.”

Tubbo turned the monitor on. Tommy’s stomach dropped as a newscast with a dark-haired new anchor began to play.

“There have been countless reports in the last few weeks of an individual in a red hooded sweatshirt jumping across buildings of Logstedshire and being involved with multiple fights,” the news anchor reported. “However, after consulting the Coalition of Heroes, there are no reports of any hero who has powers that resemble those stationed in Logstedshire.”

They could be talking about any guy in a red sweatshirt, thought Tommy. This doesn’t prove anything. I’m fine.

The anchor's voice began to play over a series of videos of this individual with a red hoodie that barely covered their short blond hair and a green bandana that wrapped around the bottom half of the individual’s face who easily floated between buildings.

shitshitshitshitshit.

The voice-over continued, “Is this super vigilante actually here to help or does this person believe that they can just forego the law and be judge, jury, and executioner?”

Tubbo paused the video and turned back to Tommy, his arms crossed again.

“So what are your thoughts on this new vigilante, Tommy? Do you think he is an egomaniac who believes he is judge, jury, and executioner?”

“The media will make anyone a villain nowadays! They just love drama honestly! From the awful videos they have, it just seems like this guy just likes jumping across rooftops. I guess jumping now is a crime.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“You asked me a question? I am so sorry, it seems like my brain is just dead tired! Maybe we can continue this conversation tomorr—”

“TOMMY!” Tubbo slammed his hands on the desk and stood up. “I only know one person with a red hoodie, blond hair, and gravity powers. And weirdly enough, it's the same person who stole my green bandana.”

“Woah, your green bandana was stolen? We should definitely look—”

“No, you are not getting away from this conversation.”

Silence fell between the two of them.

Tommy was the first to break it, “Where is Ranboo?”

“He’s sleeping,” Tubbo answered, gesturing towards the bed in the corner. The raised hump on the bed barely moved up and down. “Unlike some people, he actually comes back to the dorm room at nighttime. What does he have to do with this?”

Tommy grabbed his suspicious roommate by the wrist and led him towards the window. “We can’t talk about this here.”

“Are you worried about Ranboo? The dude sleeps like a rock,” Tubbo replied as Tommy climbed out of the window. He reached out his hand and Tubbo just crossed his arms.

“Can we just talk about this outside? I don’t trust him.”

“He’s not the only person who you don’t trust.”

Tommy felt a sharp pang in his chest. Tubbo had been Tommy’s best friend through thick and thin. When Tommy had sprained his ankle in third grade after the resident bully had tripped him, the next day, Tubbo had kicked a soccer ball straight into the bully’s face and gave him a nose bleed. And then there was the time that Tubbo had spilled Coke all over his shirt right before picture day so Tommy poured his Coke on his shirt so they could match. They always chose each other first in dodgeball; they were always partners during the three-legged race; they always were Tubbo and Tommy. Tommy and Tubbo. Tommy trusted him with his life.

Just not with my secret superhero lifestyle, he thought. An ache began to form behind his forehead.

“Tubbo, please, let me explain,” Tommy stretched out his hand again.

Tubbo let out a soft sigh and grabbed it, “But you better not be pulling me out of the window just to drop me three stories so you can escape this conversation.”

“Don’t give me any bright ideas,” Tommy smiled and decreased their gravity as they floated to the roof of their dorms. As they landed on the roof, Tommy noticed Tubbo’s death grip on his sleeve.

“You can let go now, Big Man. I’m not going to let you float off the roof. You act like this is the first time we’ve been up here,” Tommy laughed.

“All the other times we’ve come up here, I wasn’t with a wanted criminal,” Tubbo’s voice was filled with venom as he sat down on the textured floor.

“Okay, so you’re still mad.”

“Of course, I’m still mad, Tommy! You lied to me! You said that your donut shop crime-fighting gig was a one-time thing!”

“It was! I swear when I told you about Niki’s I was planning to stop there! But, I guess, I just started to notice all the bad stuff around me,” Tommy paused. He broke eye contact with his roommate and gazed at the bright city lights below them. Distant honks and sirens filled the tense air between them.

“Why can’t you just let the heroes do their jobs?” Tubbo protested.

Why couldn’t Tommy let the heroes do this? There are news reports every day of Dream and Blaze and the other superheroes stopping bank robbers, car accidents, pulling people out of fires, and many more. On the surface, it seemed like they had it all covered.

He had been thrown from house to house when he was in the foster system. He was attending a big school fancy with kids who had dads with at least 3 yachts each. Growing up he was told he was a waste of space, a lost cause, a problem that adults just wanted to push onto someone else. He had always felt out of place.

But when he put on the red hoodie it made him feel... not like that. It made him feel like himself.

“Not a lot of people can do what I can do. I wanted to work for Dream because he’s a hero and heroes are supposed to help people. But when I realized all I did for that green asshole was fill out the paperwork he didn’t want to do and bring him coffee in his office as he sat doing *nothing*, I couldn’t stand it. All the famous heroes do is sit around until someone calls them and by the time they come the criminal is gone! I couldn’t sit around anymore. It didn’t feel right.”

Tommy turned back to Tubbo hunched over, his chin resting on crossed hands. He was having an intense staring contest with his shoes. Tommy hoped that Tubbo was simply collecting his thoughts and not thinking about ways to call the police. No, Tubbo wouldn’t do that. He wouldn’t rat Tommy out even though Tommy was supposed to be his best friend and not keep secrets from him.

Tubbo wouldn’t rat him out, but Tommy wasn’t sure if he would ever talk to him again.

“You could get arrested,” Tubbo finally said softly after what felt like an eternity.

“Yeah.”

“You could get shot.”

“Yep.”

“And then die.”

“That’s definitely a possibility.”

“You could get *expelled*, Tommy,” Tubbo looked up and met his eyes.

“I would have thought getting shot is worse than getting expelled, but I’m not going to try to understand your mind.”

“I’m being serious!”

“And so am I! I’m usually more concerned though when I’m being shot at rather than writing an essay for Mr. Soot.”

“Have you been shot at?”

“Would it help if I said no?”

Tubbo groaned and his face fell into his hands. The two of them returned to sitting in silence, only the night traffic from the city below filling the space between. A cold wind blew past them, and Tommy tried to resist the urge to shiver. However, the chill evening air had other plans for him and his body began to quiver. Tommy crossed his arms and tried to conserve as much body heat as possible.

“Is that all you wear?” Tubbo’s voice made him raise his head out of his arms.

“Uh, yeah?” Tommy replied.

“A normal cotton hoodie, sweatpants, and a green bandana? Seriously?”

“Okay so now you’re mad about my fashion choices?”

“How do you know where to fight criminals?”

“Changing the subject, alright. I found a way to listen to police scanners from my phone.”

“Your phone? Really? At this point, you’re asking to be caught,” Tubbo scoffed.

“Why do you care? I thought you didn’t want me to do this,” Tommy burrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

“I’ve known you long enough to know that when you want to do something, there is no use trying to stop you,” Tubbo smirked. “You’re stubborn, annoying, and very average at most things.”

“Thank you for the very kind comments,” Tommy rolled his eyes.

Tubbo went on, “But luckily you also have an incredibly smart best friend and roommate.”

“Wait...”

“Tommy, I don’t care that you’re going around being a vigilante. What upset me is that you never told me! I had to find out from a random news broadcast! I thought we were closer than that... I thought you trusted me.”

“I do trust you, Tubbo! I just—”

“No!” Tubbo cut him off. “No more excuses! We either do this together or stop doing it! You’re not the only one that hates sitting around doing nothing!”

“I can’t risk you being in danger!”

“Neither can I!”

Tommy paused. He didn't want to admit it but Tubbo made a point. As much as Tommy wanted to protect his best friend, Tubbo wanted to protect *his* best friend.

"If you actually trust me, you'll let me help you," Tubbo softly stated.

Tommy let out a deep sigh. The temperature had dropped and his breaths began to form into a mist as he stressed, "What if we get caught?"

"That's the difference between you and me, Big Man. I don't get caught." Tubbo smirked as another breeze whistled past them, "Remember how you barely passed Spanish last year?"

"Uh, yeah?"

"Well, hate to break to you, but you didn't pass."

"Are you serious? I studied so hard for that class!"

Was that why Señor Quackity kept trying to recruit Tommy into taking another Spanish class? Tubbo ignored Tommy's reaction to the revelation that he did not pass his Spanish class and continued, "If you want to compete with any of those glorified asswipers then you're going to need the right resources. You don't have to do this alone."

Tommy sighed, "You know, Tubbo, you're being extremely clingy right now."

"Actually I take back everything I've said and I'm going to call the police."

"Try it and I'll just make you float into space, never to be seen again," Tommy said a smile spreading across his face.

"Honestly I'm fine with that if that's what it takes to never see that outfit again," Tubbo stood up and grabbed Tommy's sleeve. "I'm honestly surprised that this thing has lasted so long, it actually the worst quality hoodie I've ever seen."

"What is up with you and this hoodie?!"

—

Tubbo had barred Tommy from going out to do his "hobby" and make him lay low for a bit because of the news report the next week. Tommy probably wouldn't have listened to him if Tubbo hadn't also taken his vigilante hoodie and bandana.

For the time being, it seemed like having Tubbo know his vigilante secret caused him to just not be a vigilante anymore. In Tommy's eyes that wasn't ideal. Tubbo on the other hand was having a field day.

“Maybe you could look for a job?” Tubbo had replied when Tommy asked what he was supposed to do on his break. Tommy was very tempted to send Tubbo into space at that moment.

Then after a week of his grounding, Tubbo came into their dorm room after work with a large box.

“Did you bring donuts from Niki’s?” Tommy inquired cheerfully, jumping up from his bed. He had been very busy staring at his blank computer screen, hoping that his essay would type itself.

“Nope,” Tubbo replied, popping the last sound of the word.

“Oh,” Tommy said in a dejected voice.

“It’s better.”

“Oh!” Tommy perked up again.

“Honestly, I was waiting to give it to you as a gift for when you got hired, but that seems like it’s not going to happen anytime soon and I’m also tired of you looking like a sad puppy every time you look out the window.”

“Somehow even as you’re giving me a gift, you still find a way to insult me.”

“That’s my specialty,” Tubbo shrugged and handed him the box, “It’s for your *afterschool activity* .”

Tommy ripped open the top of the box and lifted out a deep red hoodie with black trim on the hood and sleeves. He slowly rubbed the lightweight fabric between his fingers as he tried to form words to describe how he felt, but nothing was coming out. He was truly speechless.

“The textile unit at Pandora Labs has been recently experimenting with creating fabric for superheroes. Apparently creating a lightweight, temperature-controlled, durable, fire resistant, and rip-proof fabric is incredibly hard to replicate in any color except for two colors: red and black,” Tubbo stated.

Tommy broke eye contact with the incredible new hoodie and looked at Tubbo with wide eyes, “Wait, please don’t tell me you stole from your job.”

“Would it help if I said no?” Tubbo smirked.

“Tubbo!”

“They had extra fabric, okay? I did not steal the fabric for your outfit,” Tubbo confessed, but then he pulled out a smaller box. “However, I might have borrowed some parts for these.”

Tommy glared at him before opening the small box. Inside was a small earpiece that resembled the wireless earbuds that neither of them could afford.

“You got me a singular headphone?” Tommy furrowed his eyebrows.

“No, dumbass, it’s a communicator. I’m not just going to let you look for criminals to fight by using your personal phone.”

“I’m still not following.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes, “I’m going to be your command central.”

“You’re a little small to be a command central, to be honest. You’re more like tech support. You could go as Tech Support Tubbo!”

“You know I can just take all this back and burn it.”

“You said it was fire-resistant!”

“Glad to you you were listening, but I still have one more thing to give you. However, I don’t know—”

“I’m sorry!” Tommy interrupted excitedly. "What is it, Command Center Tubbo?!"

“Alright, alright. I don’t enjoy the fact that you keep on taking my bandana without my permission,” Tubbo continued.

“It’s not like you use it.”

“You keep taking it!”

“What would you even use it for?”

“Regardless, a bandana is an awful way of concealing your identity,” Tubbo leaned forward and reached into the box and pulled out a red eye-mask.

“It’s made with a polymer that molds to the face of the wearer. Another gift from having a rotation in the textile unit,” he stated before handing Tommy the mask.

He gently took the mask and rotated it, looking at all its sides. This was his mask. Like a real-deal superhero mask.

Tubbo went on, “I was considering making a half mask, kind of like how you wore the bandana, but I opted for the eye-mask. It felt more like you.”

“You are the greatest command central ever,” Tommy replied with a bright smile.

“Well, I couldn’t continue letting you fight bad guys in that crusty hoodie.”

“Thank you, Tubbo. Seriously, this is incredible.”

“It’s no problem. I always have your back, Tommy.”

Suddenly a phone vibrated, making Tommy jump a bit and the mask began to float. Tubbo reached into his pocket and took out his phone.

He grabbed the mask before it floated too far and asked, “Who was that?”

“Ranboo. He said he will be back late. Something came up at his work.”

“Why is Ran-boob texting you his whereabouts?” Tommy groaned. Of course, Ranboo would text at this very important best friend moment between Tubbo and him.

“I had asked him when he would be back at the dorm.”

“ *You* asked *him*? Why would you do that?”

“Because we are *friends*, Tommy. Ranboo is my friend so I text him.”

“Betrayal, utter betrayal.”

“I was making sure that he wasn’t here when I gave *you* your gift.”

“Oh.”

Tubbo hummed in response before his phone began to ping with a new sound Tommy had not heard before.

“Now what was that?” Tommy didn’t realize his roommate was this popular.

Tech Support Tubbo gave him a wide smile, “An opportunity to try out your new threads.”

—

“*Alright, now you will jump to the building on your right,*” Tubbo’s voice buzzed in his ear as Tommy floated between buildings.

“Where are we going again?” Tommy questioned. “You do understand that I usually just roam around until I find criminals.”

“*Why are you telling me that you were being lazy as a vigilante? Also, you’re almost there, look for a small business with a red banner.*”

“Listen you’ve already committed to the cause so you can’t get out of this. You’re stuck with me forever,” he replied as he landed in front of a small shop with tinted windows.

“*Clingy. Alright, this is the place that had a silent alarm set off. I guess it’s time to do whatever vigilante stuff you do.*”

“I usually don’t snoop around, Tubs. I deal with the criminals when they are he–” Suddenly a large crash came from the ally next to the building.

Tommy immediately ran towards the sound and found a figure standing in the dark alley, holding a bag filled with what Tommy assumed was stolen goods. He raced towards the figure, decreasing his gravity right before reinstating his normal gravity and tackling the criminal.

“Have you considered checking online what the business hours are before you break into a store?” Tommy quipped as he snatched the bag away from the man.

The man lifted his head and glared at him behind a pair of red and blue sunglasses.

Tommy gasped, “I know you! You were the dumb guy who tried to rob a bakery! How was prison? Do they have donuts in prison?”

“Fuck you,” the sunglassed man sneered. He then lowered his glasses and two lasers shot out of his eyes that directly pointed at Tommy.

Tommy leaped out of the way, but at the same moment he threw the bag he was holding towards the laser. The beams hit the bag and it exploded, sparks and fire lighting up the alleyway.

Tommy shielded his eyes as the other man gaped in surprise.

“Hope there wasn’t anything too important in that,” Tommy remarked.

“What the hell did you do?!” he snarled as he ran over to the burned mess of fabric and metal.

“Dude, why are you asking me? You’re the one who blasted the bag,” Tommy shrugged before jumping over him and slightly touching his shoulder. The man fell flat on his face with a grunt as Tommy increased his gravity.

“Listen, man, we wouldn’t need to keep on doing this if you just stopped breaking into places and stealing stuff,” he continued.

“Mm-ou mm-ill m-ay,” the man mumbled, his words being lost to the concrete.

“Yeah, I have no idea what you just said. Sorry about the bag again! Stop stealing stuff! Bye!” Tommy waved before floating up towards the roof.

“I think he said ‘you will pay’ or something like that,” Tubbo’s voice returned to his ear, making Tommy jump in surprise as he landed on the top of the building.

“Oh Prime! I forgot you were here!” Tommy squeaked in a very manly way.

Tubbo laughed, *“I was here the whole time, but I didn’t want to interrupt your vigilante groove.”*

“You could never interrupt my vigilante groove, I’m just that good,” he brushed back his hair confidently.

“Is that so?” A new voice spoke behind him and Tommy whipped around. His blood went cold as he immediately recognized the person that spoke.

At the other end of the roof stood a hooded man, outfitted in green and a mask with a smiley face.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

hi sorry for the long wait! I'm slowly getting back into the groove of things! Hopefully, Wednesdays can be post days but we shall see lol

Also please forgive me for any spelling mistakes lol just close your eyes

Check me out on all my socials as well!

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Rule #5: Sidekicks are Cringe

Chapter Notes

It is Wednesday! And my birthday! My gift to myself is to force myself to write this story and get it out on Wednesdays lol

Thank you for all the love on this fic so far! It really means the world to me when I see your responses to my writing and my comics I really appreciate it <3 I try to respond to as many comments as I can so sorry if I missed yours but I promise I read them all!

Tw: fighting for the first part but it's not too much please let me know if I should tag anything else!

(Also please forgive any spelling mistakes or formatting mistakes, just close your eyes lol)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Is that so?” asked the Number One Hero of L’Manburg. He was also known as Tommy’s old boss: Dream.

Dream stood across the roof, decked out in his usual dark green hooded outfit. Tommy tried not to make eye contact with the smile that dawned on the hero’s mask and instead focused on the man’s large axe which glinted in the moonlight.

Maybe he’s not talking to me , Tommy thought. *He could be talking to a different guy on this roof.*

“Red Hood Vigilante?” Dream tilted his head.

Shit.

“Ender, you were slow,” the hero stated.

“What the hell is an Ender?” Tommy wondered aloud.

VWOOP!

Suddenly a figure appeared next to Dream, purple particles flurrying around them.

“Sorry, sir,” the newest occupant of the roof replied in a deep voice.

Tommy had been actively trying to forget his time as Dream’s personal butler, but there were some facts about the hero that were permanently drilled into his head.

The majority of the time he took jobs by himself and worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, barely taking time to even sleep. The man ran on coffee and the ability to boss people around. But when the number one hero had to work with others (usually required by the Collision), his main choices were Blaze or The Shadow. Blaze was a bitch to get a hold of and Shadow was actually pretty nice but hated when Tommy cursed. However, Dream's preferred partner, 404, had been out of the public eye for the past 6 months. He left around the same time Tommy started working at his internship.

And even though Tommy had never met the hero who created illusions, the last time he checked 404 did not wear a long purple cloak with whips of black smoke trailing his feet and a black and white mask that covered his face from his nose to his chin.

The new guy stood slightly behind Dream like he was aiming to keep Dream in his eye view as he stared at Tommy. His head was slightly bowed like he was disappointed that the hero called him out. The guy even called Dream 'sir' like he was the hero's personal b— It hit Tommy.

"No way, Dream! You got a sidekick?!" Tommy exclaimed. "What is he going to do? Compliment your bald head as you look in every mirror you come across?"

"Excuse me?" Dream asked, tilting his head in irritation. Tommy enjoyed being a vigilante.

"Did you just say Dream? Like the hero? Get out of there!" his very obvious roommate hissed in his ear. *"Also the news has no mention of Dream getting a sidekick. This must be their first time working together."*

Ender is the new kid on the block. Maybe Tommy could work with that.

"I'm more of a mentee," Ender chimed in softly and then turned to Dream asking, "Also is he allowed to say that?"

"No," the hero replied sternly to his 'mentee.' Who would want to be Dream's mentee? The guy is a certified asswipe.

Tommy took a step back, "Anyways! It was great meeting you! But I should probably be heading out n—"

"Ender," Dream interrupted.

"Got him, sir," Ender answered just as he appeared next to Tommy in a poof of purple particles and placed a hand on Tommy's shoulder.

"You are under arrest for impersonating a hero, Red Hood Vigilante," Dream dictated as he pulled out a pair of handcuffs.

"Are we really set on that name for me? I just don't think it fits my energy. Plus, I only wear the hood on occasion!" He said as he waved a hand at his head. However, Ender grabbed his wrist and twisted it behind his back resulting in Tommy wincing in pain.

On the other end of his communicator, he heard his command central typing away.

“Listen, Tommy, the information on you is very limited,” Tubbo whispered. “ They probably have no idea what your powers are exactly.”

Oh, Tommy definitely could work with that.

“Alright. We can workshop the name later,” Tommy grunted as he felt Ender’s grip tighten and Dream begin to walk towards them.

“I would recommend that you stop talking, unless you want me to send you directly to jail,” Dream informed.

“Are you going to that before or after your new sidekick floats into the atmosphere?” Tommy answered, a smile spreading across his face.

“Wha-” Dream started but was quickly cut off by a yelp behind Tommy.

“Um, Dream! What is happening?!” Ender’s voice trembled as his body began to rise off the rooftop, clinging to Tommy as an anchor.

However, Tommy would not let him have that sweet luxury and ripped his wrists away from the cloaked sidekick. He stifled a laugh as he watched Ender fail to teleport back to the ground. He popped around the rooftop flailing his arms and leaving a trail of purple particles.

Apparently, a lack of gravity and teleportation does not mix. Tommy made a mental note of that.

“Ender! Stop teleporting!” Dream yelled. Then he grabbed a fist full of Tommy’s hoodie, lifting him up, and hissed, “Put. Him. Down.”

Tommy had filled out hours of paperwork for every single one of Dream’s ridiculous requests. He picked up every phone call even as he filed through the dozens of emails he got each day. He ate breakfast on the train to his internship and worked during his lunch breaks and missed every other pizza night with Tubbo. He never got to enjoy the free coffee bar in the lobby because he was too busy getting Dream 12 cups of espresso.

However, now Tommy buzzed with excitement as he realized he was going to be able to say to Dream the one thing he had been wanting to say for the six months he worked for him.

Tommy gripped the hero’s wrist as he reflected a grin back at the hero’s mask and smugly replied, “No. I can’t. Sorry.”

“Dream! Sir! I really would like to come back down!” Ender yelped from behind them, still slowly floating towards the night sky.

A moment passed as if Dream was considering letting his new recruit fly into space and take Tommy in for questioning. If Ender got lost in the atmosphere, would Dream charge Tommy for manslaughter? Sounds like something Dream would do.

Instead, he cursed and threw Tommy to the ground. The hero turned and vanished in a veil of purple particles and reappeared next to Ender. He grabbed his sidekick's arm and disappeared from the sky and materialized with more particles on the roof across from Tommy.

"You know Dream, your party trick is really nice. It's smart that you found a sidekick with such a convenient power. Plus it seems like you've already got the hang of his power! You're like a real-life copy machine! Well, I guess, a real-life copy machine is a copy machine so you're still a fraud," Tommy shrugged. "Moving on! Sucks that you forgot to do any type of research on me before you came."

"Do not move from that spot, vigilante," Dream sneered as Ender clutched his arm, focusing on keeping his feet on the ground.

"Right back at ya, Number One Hero," Tommy smirked as he increased the gravity on Dream. Immediately feeling the change in pressure, the hero fell down to one knee.

"Dream, are you okay?" Ender worried, luckily still holding on even with the sudden movement change.

Dream grunted in response, but Tommy continued speaking, "I'm going to head out now, boys! But I think we all learned a very valuable lesson: we really need to get away from the 'Red Hoodie Vigilante' name. It's *so* long! Keep on thinking! I believe in you and your very bald heads! Bye!"

And with a wave the red hooded vigilante whose name was definitely not 'Red Hood Vigilante', leaped off the building, leaving a new mentor and mentee stuck to a random rooftop in Logstedshire.

As Tommy ran through alleyways, Tubbo chimed in his ear with directions towards their dorm.

"Tommy, I have a question," Tubbo asked after giving Tommy his latest direction.

"Yeah?" he replied.

"Is Dream actually bald?"

—

Tommy was against his greatest foe yet. He had fought dozens of robbers, stopped car thieves, and saved a cat from a tree, but none of his previous encounters could compare to this. No amount of training could've even prepared him for it. He was barely hanging on, his brain was barely keeping up with the thousands of thoughts that banged around his head. He gritted his teeth as he realized that he actually might lose this battle. How could he ever recover from a loss like—

“Seriously man? Are you still working on the essay?” Tubbo interrupted as he leaned over to look at Tommy’s empty screen.

He slammed his laptop shut and quickly replied with a sneer, “It is a work in progress.”

“It’s a three-hundred-word paragraph about a Greek poem that we discussed in class together. How much work do you need to progress?” Tubbo raised his eyebrow.

“I am *so* sorry that I don’t love Greek poems as much as that one guy likes having sex with his own mom,” Tommy answered.

“It’s nice to know that you reference the things you learn in my class in your daily conversations, Tommy,” a familiar voice came from across the library table where Tommy and Tubbo resided.

“Hi, Mr. Soot!” Tubbo happily greeted their sweater vest-wearing English teacher. Who even wore sweater vests anymore? They were just sleeveless sweaters. Sleeves were cool. Tommy liked sleeves.

“Good afternoon, Tubbo.,” Mr. Soot responded before turning to Tommy with a slight smile. “Good afternoon to you as well, Tommy.”

“G’afternoon,” Tommy mumbled as his eyes bore holes into the wooden table.

“I hope you two are doing well,” Mr. Soot continued as Tommy felt his eyes on him.

“Thank you!” Tubbo replied probably with a dumb grin on his face. Tommy didn’t see though because he was too busy counting the number of lines that stretched along the table. So far he had counted 10, but there were definitely more and it was Tommy’s job to count them all.

His job. Job. *Oh, Fu—*

“So Tommy, how is the job hunt going?” Tommy’s head snapped up just as Mr. Soot finished his question.

“Mr. Soot, I—” Tommy began but was swiftly cut off by his teacher.

“You know it’s about to be day eight of your five-day deadline for your job search,” Mr. Soot pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. “But I also know that you are a responsible young man and you always adhere to the deadlines.”

Tommy stared at Mr. Soot with wide eyes as he felt Tubbo shift next to him.

Tubbo knew that if he needed Tommy to be on time somewhere then he would tell him an earlier time because Tommy would be so late he would then be on time. Tommy knew that he barely ever caught the correct train because he always slept through his three alarms. And Mr. Soot definitely knew that every single assignment Tommy had ever done for him was turned in late.

Tommy had never adhered to a deadline in his life. The word ‘deadline’ probably wasn’t even in his vocabulary.

“After I never received the form that was supposed to be signed by your new employer, I assumed your new job was *so great* that you forgot to give me back the form,” Mr. Soot raised his eyebrows as he leaned forward onto his elbows. “Would I be correct in that statement? You just forgot to turn in the form even though you got a new job last week?”

Mr. Soot paused, signaling Tommy that he was now allowed to speak. So Tommy did what he did best: he spoke without thinking.

“Yes,” he answered.

Tubbo cleared his throat and turned to Tommy with a glare which Tommy translated to something along the lines ‘*what the fuck are you doing?*’

Tommy quickly returned his attention back to Mr. Soot and said more confidently, “Yes. I have a job. I apologize that I forgot to turn in the form.”

Apparently lying was what he was doing, Tubbo.

“Great!” Mr. Soot clapped his hands together and stood up. “I will just tell Headmaster Eret that you will turn in the form tomorrow after your work day. Does that sound alright?”

“That is great! That is fantastic! Tomorrow is pog!” Tommy excitedly jumped up, heat pounding as he doubled down on his lie.

“Good. Good. Just remember, Tommy, *Headmaster Eret* needs the form by *tomorrow*. *No exceptions*,” Mr. Soot stressed.

Tommy's chest tightened. Mr. Soot's serious eyes stared at him as if he was made of glass and the Greek poem-obsessed English teacher could see every single one of his secrets.

He wiped his clammy hands on his pants, “I can get it to them by tomorrow. I swear.”

“I know you will. I’ll see you two in class,” Mr. Soot waved as he turned and walked out of the library.

When the teacher was finally out of earshot, Tommy fell into his chair in exhaustion. His head followed suit as he groaned into his hands.

“What the hell was that? Why did you tell him you had a job?” Tubbo probed.

“I didn’t have a choice!”

“You are fucked,” his very observant roommate noted. Maybe Tubbo should go as Captain Obvious instead of Command Central.

“Yeah, no shit, Tubbo,” Tommy scoffed as he began to shove all his things into his backpack.

“Where are you going?”

“Where do you think I’m going? I have to find a job before I get expelled.”

—

“I see here on your resume that you worked for the Hero Collision for about six months,” asked the short-haired blond lady that sat across from Tommy.

“Yes, I was one of the hero’s personal assistants,” he answered.

He felt beads of sweat on his neck as he resisted squirming in his tie. He felt naked without his suit jacket, but he had spilled coffee on his, and Tubbo’s was too small on him so here he sat jacket-less under the watchful gaze of the singular recruiter that returned his call.

“Which hero?” she followed up.

Tommy gritted his teeth and tried not to scowl as he said, “Dream.”

The woman’s face lit up when he said the Green Teletubby’s name. Of course, the interviewer was a Dream fan.

“Really? It must have been an amazing opportunity to be able to work with such an influential figure! Why did you not continue your position there?” she inquired.

Because Dream is a horrible boss and hates children , Tommy thought.

“I learned a great deal working there. However, I realized I was not working to my potential as Dream’s assistant,” Tommy forced out professionally. “I’m looking to improve my skillsets in a different environment.”

“You are looking to improve your skillset as a barista in a coffee shop?” the lady raised an eyebrow.

“Yes.”

Please hire me. Please hire me. Please hire me, Tommy thought.

“It was so nice talking to you, Thomas. We will get back to you at a later date,” the lady stood up with a sympathetic smile.

Shit.

“Thank you for your time. I really appreciate it,” Tommy also stood up and shook the lady’s hand.

A bell rang as Tommy exited the coffee shop and squinted his eyes as he stepped into the sunny sidewalk. People walked past him in a hurry as he gripped one last paper copy of his resume. He had been walking down the streets of Central L'Manburg entering shops handing them his resume and hoping someone would hire him on the spot. Even with his charming smile and irresistible charm he was having no luck.

He sighed and folded the paper and stuck it into his pocket. He began walking with no real destination in mind. It was too late to apply for a job at Pandora Labs with Tubbo. At one point he considered asking Niki for a job, but working at a bakery required him to be there almost daily and that wouldn't work with the requirements within his scholarship.

Mayor Schlatt was always complaining about the unemployment rates, but Tommy was now starting to think that he was pulling stuff out of his ass. He basically begging for a job and now one would take him! He had the perfect attributes for an underpaid and overworked blue-collar worker! It was a shame that no giant cooperation wanted to take advantage of him.

His phone vibrated and he pulled it out to see a message from Tubbo.

TUBBO: If you have some downtime during your job search, I thought you would be interested in this... :)

Below the message was a link to a news article. Tommy tapped the link and immediately frowned. The title of the article read:

Dream Introduces New Sidekick!

L'Manburg's newest hero is sure to teleport into our hearts!

He quickly scrolled to have his phone filled with a picture of Dream and his emo wannabe of a sidekick waving to fans and reporters. Tommy wanted to vomit. He quickly stuffed his phone back into his pocket. He had enough of those two already. Tommy just wanted to do was get away from all this.

He had just spent 6 months devoting his life to Dream. And even after he quit his job with Dream, it seemed like all everyone wanted to talk to him about was still Dream! All his classmates would ask questions about Dream like if they could get an autograph or a picture (Dream only gave out autographs and pictures at a designated meet and greet) or what his favorite cereal was (cheerios). All interviewers wanted to talk about what it was like being Dream's assistant (terrible) and why he left (because he hated Dream) or why he got fired

(Tommy did NOT get fired). All anyone wanted to know was what Tommy knew about Dream.

Well, Tommy was done talking about Dream. Tommy was done even thinking about Dream! Tommy would be satisfied with his life if he never had to encounter Dream again in his life!

Suddenly someone ran into his shoulder, causing him to fall to the ground.

“Oh my Prime! I am so sorry! Are you alright?” panicked a voice behind him. Tommy looked up to find a girl around his age hovering above him, worry filling her eyes.

Tommy dusted off his knees and inspected his hands before giving her a reassuring smile, “I’m okay! Don’t worry.”

“Again, I am so sorry about bumping into you!” she said before running off in the opposite direction.

He watched her bob and weave between people until he realized everyone on the street was going in the same direction as her. Suddenly he was slowly being pushed by the wave of people trying to get to some unknown destination.

“Where is everyone going?” he tried to ask the people around him, slightly yelling above the loud chattering that filled the air around him. However, they did not need to answer because he was given an answer as a crowd suddenly began screaming in excitement.

Tommy froze as he realized that Dream and Ender were walking straight toward him.

Confronting Dream when he was a masked vigilante was easy. Last night Dream had no idea that he was getting owned by his ex-assistant. However, right now was different. Tommy wasn’t a vigilante. Tommy was just Tommy in a sweaty dress shirt and tie. And Dream knew Tommy. The same Tommy who quit without an explanation.

Dream and Ender gave small waves to their adoring fans as they stepped closer and closer to his position. Dream couldn’t do anything to Tommy since he was just a civilian right now, but Tommy couldn’t risk an even worse fate than being arrested for being a vigilante: having an awkward moment with his ex-boss in public.

Tommy whipped his head left and right, desperately looking for an escape route. His eyes fell on a small shop with its door slightly ajar only a few steps away. Pog.

Ducking his head down, he unstuck his feet from the sidewalk and ran to the shop. He popped open the door and quickly jumped inside and crouched underneath the window of the shop.

He waited a few seconds, his heart beating in his ears. He then slowly turned to look out the window to see if the heroes had passed.

“May I help you?” Tommy jumped at the deep voice, floating a bit before quickly reinstating his gravity. He whipped around and was face to face with the owner of the voice. A man with

a long pink braid, square glasses, and broad shoulders towered over Tommy with an indifferent face.

Seeing that he was stuck between what felt like a rock and a hard place (or in this case a giant stranger and his old boss), Tommy did what he did best: act without thinking.

He unfurled the paper from his pocket and held it out at the large man and replied, "I would like to apply for a job."

Chapter End Notes

I want to make a small note before continuing with writing the rest of this story. I will be continuing to write Techno's character in this story. I considered rearranging some things and not including him since this is a work in progress and mainly a bench trio centric fic, but then I realized that, honestly, the best way to honor him is to continue his legacy and write about the supercool character he created. All things I write about are the characters and not content creators in general so I want to keep on including c!Techno in my work. He brought a lot of joy into my life and I am inspired by all the work he was able to do in his life. I want to bring joy to others' lives and I hope I can honor him by continuing to include him in my work. Plus he'd love the clout.

Here's to continuing the story! Hope you all have a wonderful day and I wish you all peace and happiness <3

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions about the story in any of these places!!

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #6: Remember to Definitely Have a Pog Work Ethic

Chapter Notes

Me: *hands you guys a 7k word chapter*

My readers: This is entirely dialogue

Me: I like dialogue :D

TW: fighting, blood-mention, vomit-mention, panic/anxiety

Please let me know if I need to tag anything else! Thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy unfurled the paper from his pocket and held it out at the large man and with a large smile said, “I would like to apply for a job.”

The pink-haired man took the paper from Tommy and slowly skimmed his resume as Tommy squirmed in his uncomfortable spot underneath the store window.

“Are you even old enough to hold a job? What are you like 10?” the man questioned with raised eyebrows.

“I am not 10! I am 16! And I am definitely old enough to have a job!” Tommy jumped up in defense.

“You do know you’re applying to a bookstore, right? Do you even know how to read?”

“I know how to read!”

“The amount of misspellings and grammar mistakes on this resume begs to differ.”

“That is not true! My resume is the greatest resume to ever exist!” Tommy had never misspelled anything ever in his life.

“You spelled ‘definitely’ with a ‘ph’ and used the word ‘pog’ to describe your work ethic.”

Maybe he had misspelled some words before. “How else was I supposed to describe my work ethic? Huh?”

The man sighed. “Alright. What’s your favorite book?”

Tommy hesitated. He was not the most avid reader around. Tubbo was the one that was the nerd, okay? Tommy was more invested in paying back his Animal Crossing debt.

“You’re applying to a bookstore and you don’t have a favorite book? This isn’t helping me believe that you know how to read,” the man said deadpanned.

“I have a favorite book! I just have read so many books that I had to think for a second!” Tommy then reached out to the bookcase next to him, grabbed the first book his hands landed on, and stretched it out to the man. “How convenient! This is my favorite book ever!”

The man stared at the cover for a second before looking back at him and asked, “Your favorite book is *The Art of War*?”

“Y-yes,” Tommy answered in a super confident and manly voice.

“Okay. What’s it about?”

“What?” Tommy’s voice was not small at all now. Nope.

“If this is your favorite book, you can tell me what it’s about, right?”

“Of course! The book is about war... and the art of it.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” the man grunted and began to turn around. “I have to ask you to leave if you’re not going to buy anything—”

“Wait! I’m a great employee! Plus this bookstore is a mess! The books aren’t even in Alphabetical order! Why are all the books that start with ‘T’ here at the front? You need my help!”

The man turned back to Tommy, his eyes squinting in disbelief, “Have you ever even been in a bookstore?”

“Hey Techno! Could you help me with the new inventory?” A man with blond hair and a green apron that matched the pink-haired man popped out behind a bookshelf holding a large box. A smile formed on his face as he made eye contact with Tommy. “Oh! I didn’t know we had a customer! Welcome! Are you looking for anything in particular?”

“Yeah, Phil, he’s looking for a job,” the pink-haired man, Techno, replied deadpanned.

Tommy glared at him before slapping on a charming smile and saying, “I just have such a passion for books and I feel like I would benefit from working at such an established place as your bookstore!”

“We aren’t even hiring,” Techno emotionlessly continued.

“Well, it might be good to have a new and young perspective since yours seems old and crusty! I also have strong arm muscles so I can lift as many books and probably even more than you!” Tommy spat back.

“Really?” Techno stepped toward him and it took all of Tommy’s willpower to not shrink back in response.

The blond man's—Phil's laugh cut through the tension and the two of them turned to see him setting down the box. Phil waved at Tommy, "Come over here, mate, and we can discuss the job."

Tommy plucked his resume from Techno's hand and smirked as he passed the pink-haired man who glared in response.

Phil led him through a maze of bookshelves towards a small reading nook where two small cushioned chairs sat across from each other. He then gestured for Tommy to sit as Tommy handed him his resume.

"So, Tommy," Phil looked up from the paper, "you would like to apply for a job at a place that isn't even hiring."

"Mhm," Tommy nodded.

"Why should I hire you?"

Tommy paused. The last time someone had asked him this question he was applying to be the assistant to the number one hero.

"Why should I hire you?" asked Dream.

Tommy sat stunned as his biggest idol just walked into the conference room. The interviewer who had been speaking to Tommy turned to the masked hero with wide eyes.

"Sir! I did not know that you-" the interviewer began but was swiftly ignored by Dream.

"It's a pretty simple question, why should I hire you?" he repeated flatly.

Tommy wiped his clammy hands on his dress pants as he tried to keep eye contact with the hero. Dream should definitely hire him. There were so many reasons why Dream should hire him, but no words were coming out of him for some reason. All he had to do was unclench his jaw and say that he was the best applicant for the job. Just unclench his jaw and then he could speak. Why couldn't he just unclench his-

Dream hummed and began to turn away.

Tommy suddenly shot up and exclaimed, "You should hire me because I will be the greatest fucking assistant you will ever have!"

Dream stopped and the interviewer's face was flushed with shock. Tommy froze as the realization of what he had just said hit him.

Well, if he was going to bomb the most important interview in his life he was not going to half-ass it.

Tommy continued without thinking, "I know that this job isn't just about working with the Number One Hero of L'manburg. It's not about fame or money or getting to go to the most pog events with lots of very hot women. It's about protecting our city. I was born and raised

here. This city is the only place I've ever known. It's my home. I want to help you protect our home . "

Tommy stood in disbelief as Dream let out a soft laugh.

"Our home. That's a new one."

"You alright, mate?" Phil's voice broke Tommy away from his thoughts. "You went a bit quiet."

"Yes!" Tommy sat up straight with a wide smile, "You should hire me because I am the greatest fucking bookstore employee you will ever have."

A beat passed before Phil gave out a hearty laugh. "Well, it seems like you're very passionate about this position. You're hired."

Tommy jumped up, "Are you serious?"

"I have never seen anyone this excited to work at a bookstore and I own this place."

Tommy grabbed Phil's hand and shook it ferociously, "Oh my Prime, thank you so much, sir!!"

"Oh no need for that. You can just call me Phil."

Phil led Tommy back to the front of the store where Techno had begun to sort through the box Phill has initially brought.

"Tommy, this is Techno. He is probably going to be the person you will be working with the most," Phil stated.

Tommy stuck his hand out, "Pleasure to be working with you, Techno! Your hair is very pink!"

"You really hired the kid?" Techno looked at Phil with his eyebrow raised.

"You're the one that is always complaining about how the shop isn't up to date. It might be nice to have new blood around," Phil replied.

"And I am full of blood!" Tommy chimed in happily. Tommy swore he saw Techno crack a smile as he shook Tommy's hand.

"My son also works here on the weekends," Phil went on, "but he has a teaching job so he isn't around that much during the week ."

"Phil! There are like 10 boxes blocking the backdoor!" A new voice shouted from across the store.

"Yeah, we're working on it, Wilbur!" Phil yelled back before turning back to Tommy. "That's my son I was telling you about. Once he makes it through the inventory, I'll introduce you."

“Phil, you would not believe the day I had,” the new voice started to come closer as they made their way to the front of the store. “You know that kid I told you about in my morning English class? Well, today Eret was chewing me out for not following up with him. I had to cover the kid’s ass and now I’m just praying that the kid found—”

From behind the bookshelves walked out the owner of the voice: a tall curly brown-haired man who wore a sweater vest.

The owner of the voice was Mr. Soot.

Mr. Soot had cut himself off and he stared at Tommy with wide eyes. Tommy probably had a similar look on his face as the two of them processed what was happening.

Phil broke the silence and happily said, “Wilbur! Meet Tommy! He is our newest employee! Tommy, this is my son, Wilbur.”

A big smirk crawled across Tommy’s face, “Nice to meet you, *Wilbur* .”

Mr. Soot— Wilbur stuck his finger at Tommy and said, “No. No, this is not happening.”

“Do you know each other?” Phil asked.

“This is my student, Phil! The exact student I’ve been telling you about for the past week!” Wilbur exclaimed. “How could you hire him?”

“How was I supposed to know that he was your student? He applied and he seemed like a good fit!” Phil shrugged.

“Good fit? He is barely passing my class! Plus the store is not even hiring!” Wilbur stated

“That’s what I said,” Techno grunted.

“I’m not passing your class?” Tommy asked.

Wilbur turned back to Tommy with an apologetic face, “You are passing, Tommy. Just barely. You really need to turn in more of your homework.”

“Maybe you need to stop assigning so much homework then, *Wilbur*, ” Tommy shot back.

Wilbur sighed as he began to rub his temples. “Phil, you do understand that he is a part of a work-study program so he can only work in the afternoons and weekends?”

“I don’t mind that. I bet Techno will be thrilled that he doesn’t have to work in the afternoons,” Phil answered.

“I do enjoy not having to work in the afternoon,” Techno confirmed.

“That’s fantastic!” Tommy yanked out the form from his pocket and held it out to Phil.

“Could you sign this saying that I’m employed now?”

“Uh, sure?” Phil took the form and signed it.

Wilbur furrowed his eyebrows. “Are you seriously doing this in front of me?”

“Why wait until tomorrow to give it to you when you’re right here?” Tommy took back the form and then immediately handed it to Wilbur. “Am I all set?”

Wilbur shook his head as he reluctantly said, “Yes, Tommy, you are all set. I will let Headmaster Eret know you have a job.”

“Pleasure doing business with you, *Wilbur* .”

“Phil, I’d like to put in my 2 weeks.”

—

Tommy spent the next few days learning the ins and out of the bookstore. Apparently, the books were organized by genre and then put in Alphabetical order by the last name of the author. Who knew?

The majority of the job was just lifting boxes of books in various parts of the store and making sure that the books were in the right places. When he wasn’t organizing inventory, Tommy was in the front with customers. Techno had designated Tommy to the front counter because (in Techno’s words) he was “the human form of those motion-activated baby toys.” Tommy knew Techno meant to insult him but Tommy embraced the title. Last week he had a whole conversation with the local park trash raccoon. It was a fantastic conversation and now he was friends with a raccoon.

In theory, Tommy could become friends with anyone he met. He was just that charismatic and charming. Who wouldn’t want to be friends with the most pog vigilante in L’Manburg? Not that he could advertise the fact that he was a vigilante... since it was technically illegal... and he was being hunted by the heroes of the city...

Anyways, the point was Tommy could have so many friends and be the most popular kid in school, but he was too busy balancing his new job, school, and his secret afterschool extracurricular activity. Tommy enjoyed having a small friend group. He was more than satisfied with his two best friends in the world: Tubbo and the trash raccoon. He didn’t need any more friends.

“Hey, Tommy, have you completed the math homework?” Ranboo called from across their dorm room.

Tommy grimaced. He especially did not need to be friends with Ranboo.

“Wouldn’t you like to know, Boo-Boy?” Tommy answered flatly.

“Uh, yes? I was just wondering if you’d like to compare answers,” Ranboo gave him a confused smile.

“Or you’re just trying to steal my answers and get out of doing your homework!” Tommy declared.

“As if anyone would want to steal your homework, Tommy,” Tubbo interjected.

Ranboo stifled a laugh and Tommy shot him a glare. “I’ll have you know that my work is very sought after. Especially now that I have Wilbur, oh I’m sorry, you guys know him as Mr. Soot, in my pocket.”

“We get it,” Tubbo groaned, “you know Mr. Soot’s dad. That doesn’t mean that Mr. Soot is going to give you good grades for your barely readable essays.”

“You don’t know that!” Tommy replied.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “I am currently editing your essay right now.”

“Oh yeah.”

“You spelled ‘necessary’ with 5 ‘C’s.”

“It’s a hard word to spell!”

“It is a hard word to spell, Tubbo,” Ranboo agreed.

“See! Even Ran-boob is agreeing with me! And we never agree!” Tommy threw his hands up in disbelief.

“That’s not true, Tommy,” Ranboo pointed out with a smile. “Your favorite hero is Dream, right? He’s my favorite hero too!”

An uncomfortable silence fell between the three roommates. Tommy scowled as he quickly turned away from the others.

A beat passed before Ranboo asked in a soft voice, “Sorry, did I say something wrong? Tubbo mentioned to me that you—”

“Dream is *not* my favorite hero,” Tommy cut him off in a sharp tone. “Maybe you should stop assuming things about people you know nothing about.”

“You’re fine, Ranboo, it’s a touchy subject for him,” Tubbo gently reassured.

“I am *so sorry* that I didn’t want to work for that dickwad anymore,” Tommy scoffed.

“He’s pretty nice to me,” Ranboo quietly voiced.

“And now he has that lame sidekick too? What’s it like having to be a servant to two stuck-up super-pricks?” Tommy’s eyes formed into slits and a frown was still spread across his face.

“I like Ender too,” Ranboo shrugged while ringing the bedsheets that he was sitting on between his hands. “He is still pretty new to all the superhero stuff. He’s trying his best.”

“I think his power is pretty cool,” Tubbo chimed in, giving a very useless and unnecessary comment. “Teleportation is useful. I understand why Dream would want him as a sidekick.”

Ranboo smiled at Tubbo’s comment as Tommy rolled his eyes. “Dream is just a big fraud. He doesn’t even have his own powers. He literally commits plagiarism every time he goes out!”

“Well, Dream’s power *is* being able to copy other people’s powers. So he kind of has to do that. Plus it seems like he’s doing quite fine since he is the number one hero,” stated Tubbo, the most unhelpful person in the room.

“Whatever,” Tommy waved him off, “I admit that teleportation is an okay power, but only if you know how to use it. Ender, on the other hand, is a fumbling idiot who couldn’t even catch the vigilante who has been helping out Logstedshire.”

Ranboo tilted his head, “How do you know that Ender encountered the Red Hood Vigilante?”

Fuck. Probably shouldn’t mention vigilante stuff in front of Dream’s assistant, Tommy thought as he quickly stole a glance at Tubbo who was giving him a death glare.

“I-I saw it on some online forums which were talking about Ender’s credibility!” Tommy quickly stammered. “It’s just a bunch of rumors and stuff! I don’t even keep up with all this superhero stuff anymore!”

“But you read online forums about Dream’s new sidekick?” Ranboo questioned, not letting Tommy out of the hole that he had dug himself into.

“I like to be an informed citizen!” Tommy rapidly answered. “Is it a crime to want to know about the heroes that potentially could save me from a burning building? Huh?”

Before Ranboo could reply, a beeping rang out. Ranboo swiftly grabbed his phone and let out a sigh.

“Sorry, it’s work. Dream wants me back at the office,” Ranboo said as he began to pack up his stuff.

“Not surprised that he wants you to come in after hours on a weekend,” Tommy murmured. “At what point can we say he is exploiting children?”

“Who would you even report Dream to? He’s basically in charge of the police?” Tubbo disputed.

“When did you become such a Dream stan?!” Tommy asked, waving his finger at his best friend.

“As much as fun it is to hear Tommy say various insults about my boss, I’m going to head out. If you ever finish your math homework and want to compare, let me know,” and with

that Ranboo left the room.

Once the door had closed with a *click*, Tubbo swiftly turned to Tommy with his arms crossed.

“Really? You just *had* to mention the fight with Dream and Ender? You know, the one that was *never* mentioned on the news and no *regular citizen* should know about?”

“It just slipped out!” Tommy admitted.

“Tommy, you need to cut Ranboo some slack. He’s not that bad when you get to know him.”

Tommy huffed in response.

Tubbo continued, “He did not intentionally get the same job that you *claim* you quit from. He wanted to be Dream’s assistant. You wanted to be Dream’s assistant at one point too.”

Tommy huffed more forcefully, refusing to acknowledge Tubbo’s weird request for Tommy to ‘understand’ Ranboo and ‘get along’ with him.

“I give up. You can fail math by yourself,” Tubbo sighed as he turned back towards his computer. “Since you’re so reluctant to speak to me, I guess you also don’t want to go on patrol—”

“That’s not true!” Tommy jumped up, pulled out his vigilante gear from beneath his bed, and immediately stuck his head into his hoodie.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” Tubbo snickered.

—

One, two, three, less – the wind no longer made his eyes water due to his new mask— *four, five, six, more* – but cold air still whistled in his ears as he jumped from rooftop to rooftop— *one, two, three, less*— he skidded along the gravel to a stop and tapped his earpiece.

“Anything yet? I’ve been just bouncing around Logstedshire for the past hour,” Tommy whined.

“*Sorry, Boss Man. I don’t have anything. It seems like the criminals are taking the night off*,” Tubbo’s voice buzzed in his ear.

“Agh!” Tommy kicked a pebble in frustration. “I finally have the time to do a longer patrol and every criminal decides to follow the law!”

“*Oh no, people are following the law and aren’t committing crimes. So sad,*” Tubbo mocked.

“Is there anything going on in the rest of the city? Like what’s happening in Central?”

“There have only been calls of noise complaints in Central district and one lady lost her dog I think.”

“I can help find a dog! Animals love me!”

“The lady already found her dog. They sent the hero, Seapeekay, to help.”

Tommy let out a groan as he dishearteningly laid down, spreading his arms and legs out. He started tracing the constellations with his eyes in the night sky, trying to curb his boredom.

“So what did you do when you didn’t have anyone to fight before I became your Central Command?” Tubbo buzzed, disturbing his constellation tracing.

“I sat alone with my thoughts,” Tommy stated blankly. “I do not recommend the experience of thinking about the relevance of your existence after 9 pm.”

“Noted .”

“But usually after I get to punch bad guys! So it isn’t all that bad!”

Suddenly beeping came from the other side of the earpiece.

Tommy immediately jumped up, “What is it? Is it a crime? Do I get to punch something?”

“The silent alarm went off at Pandora Laboratories. Weird thing is that there are no reports of any police or heroes headed towards it.”

“No police and no heroes? That sounds like my ideal situation,” Tommy grinned as he leaped off the building.

“Whoever broke in probably messed with the security system, but they forgot to disable the most basic alarm. Feels like a bunch of amateurs. Also, you need to head northwest.”

“A bunch of amateurs and a bunch of *nerds* !” Tommy laughed as he floated towards another rooftop. He was hilarious. “Who breaks into a laboratory? What do they need? Test tubes?”

Tommy just knew Tubbo was shaking his head as he sighed disappointedly, *“I’m not going even to bother trying to explain to you the fact that there is extremely confidential research at Pandora Laboratories. Just know that the person breaking in probably wants more than test tubes.”*

“Whatever you say, Command Central!” Tommy replied as he skidded onto the roof of Pandora Laboratories.

After glancing around the roof for points of entry, he swiftly kicked open a Tommy-sized vent and slipped into the building.

“Do you know where I’m supposed to be heading?” Tommy whispered as he slowly crawled through the dusty shaft.

“Give me a second,” answered Tubbo, followed by rapid keyboard clicks. *“Alright, I have the last footage that the security cameras captured before they were cut off. It seems like two—no, three individuals were recorded moving on the top floor.”*

“Got it!” Tommy slightly increased his gravity at the next duct, crashed it open, and fell into an empty room lined with lab workbenches, various machines, and most importantly: test tubes.

“Please try to refrain from destroying my place of work,” Tubbo buzzed in his ear.

He winced at the hole that he had formed from exiting the vent. Yikes. What was a little property damage charge along with his illegal vigilantism charge?

“Sorry, it was an honest mistake,” Tommy apologized sheepishly.

As it seemed that no one was stealing the test tubes from this room, Tommy quietly slipped into the hallway.

“So what do they even do on this floor?” Tommy whispered as he sneaked by various rooms filled with different kinds of equipment that were probably worth more than Tommy could ever earn in a lifetime working at the bookstore.

“I don’t have clearance for the top floor, so I haven’t been there in person, but from what I’ve heard, they test out a lot of experimental hero equipment there. You know Dream’s retractable axe?”

“The axe that he was swinging at me last week? Yes, I know it well.”

“That was developed at Pandora Labs. However lately, I’ve heard they’ve been trying to develop a power neutralizer.”

Before Tommy could reply, he heard multiple voices coming from down the hallway. He rushed behind a corner and then slowly peered into the hallway where the noise was coming from.

“I think I found the intruders,” Tommy informed Tubbo quietly.

Faint light poured out of a lab with a broken door. As Tommy crept closer to the door, the multiple voices began to become more clear.

“I’m getting a feeling that you’re not very good at opening up safes, Shockwave,” grunted a deep voice.

Shockwave? Tommy smirked as he recognized the name.

“I know you guys! You’re the clowns that have weirdly accurate code names!” Tommy declared as he stepped into the open doorframe. “Or are those your real names? Did your

mother hear your ugly voice and name you Shockwave?”

The three villains whipped their heads around. They were all wearing black combat gear, just like the last time Tommy had encountered them, and even though they were matching in dark masks, that was the only similarity that they shared. Angel stood to the far left with large dark wings rising from his back. Across from him stood Blade who was keeping true to his name and pointed a long sword at Tommy’s chest. And at the back of the room, hunched over a small keypad was Shockwave who (Tommy assumed) was glaring at him behind his red goggles.

“Who’s this guy?” Blade asked in a monotone voice.

“I thought you said you had disabled any alarms from going out,” Angel stated, turning towards Shockwave.

Shockwave ignored him and hissed, “You’re the little shit that threw a shipping container at me at the docks.”

Tommy shook his head, “For a guy who can control vibrations, you’re not a very good listener. I didn’t *throw* anything. I just made it *fall* towards you. I know it’s a bit confusing but you’ll have a lot of time to think when you’re in prison.”

“I still have no idea who you are,” Blade said before slashing his weapon.

Tommy immediately decreased his gravity and tried to dodge, but Blade was faster and Tommy felt a sharp sting as the edge of the sword grazed his cheek. Tommy jumped onto a nearby lab table and wiped his face, red smearing across the back of his hand. Suddenly the wind was knocked out of his lungs as he was slammed into a wall by a dark wing.

“Shockwave, focus on opening that safe,” Angel calmly dictated to his partner.

“The hero-wannabe has gravity powers! He can affect the things he touches! Don’t let him—” However, Shockwave’s warning was a second too late as Tommy grabbed onto the wing and increased its gravity tenfold. Angel stumbled to the left as his wing became useless.

“Sorry! I’m not a chicken wing kind of guy! I prefer drumsticks! OH SH—” Tommy had no time to revel in his incredible crimefighting ability as he narrowly avoided getting stabbed in the eye.

He looked back to see Blade wrenching his sword out of the wall where Tommy had just stood.

“Don’t let him touch us. Got it,” Blade finished the warning as he slowly walked towards Tommy.

Maybe he should stop telling villains about his powers.

Blade attacked again and Tommy flung to the right as he anchored his gravity to the wall. Tommy ping-ponged between the walls with Blade right behind him as if he was playing a

very deadly version of tag. If he wanted to ground Blade, he would have to get near him, but that currently wasn't an option without getting sliced into Tommy-strips.

"Listen man!" Tommy called out, "If I have enough women chasing me in the daytime! I am not interested!"

"You're joking a lot for a guy who's losing a fight," Blade replied apathetically.

"Who said I was joking? Women love— *OOF!* " Tommy suddenly slammed full force into a wall of feathers and pain stung his whole body as he landed back on the ground.

He looked up to find Angel looming over him, stretching out his wings. *Shit*. He had been so focused on escaping Blade that he forgot about keeping the pressure on Angel.

On the other side of the room, the safe beeped and swung open with a metallic clang and Shockwave yelled, "Got it!"

"Blade, tie him up," Angel said as he turned away.

Blade began to come towards him and Tommy crawled back until his back hit the wall. These b-grade villains weren't going to bring him down this easily.

So he would just have to go up.

Tommy craned his neck and anchored his gravity to the ceiling. Tommy flew upwards, barely avoiding Blade's snatch. He flipped onto his feet and started running along the ceiling over Blade and Angel and towards Shockwave who was stuffing a bag with the contents of the safe. No one would notice footprints on the ceiling. Probably.

Once he was over Shockwave, he anchored his gravity back to the ground and slammed feet first into the villain. The bag with the equipment skidded across the room as Tommy increased Shockwave's gravity. Tommy stood over him as the villain struggled to get up from the ground.

Tommy smirked, "Thanks for cushioning my fall."

"We don't have time for this," Shockwave growled in a dark voice. "Let *go*."

On his last word, an invisible punch launched Tommy into a wall with a crack. Tommy groaned as blackspots began to fill his vision.

Fuck, he thought, *I forgot this was the vibration bitch*.

Tommy turned his gaze back to the villains to see Shockwave slowly rising up. Tommy perched up to one knee but immediately the room began to shake. He fell back down as he pushed down the need to throw up. He felt a layer of sweat cover his whole body and was burning up at an alarming rate. He was too hot. He brought his knees up to his chin, trying to control his breathing. In. Out. In. Out. He needed to calm down, but it wasn't working.

Why couldn't he calm down?

Suddenly a ringing amplified by a hundred percent attacked his ears. His hands flung to cover them; his fingers twisting into his hair. He needed to get up and stop the criminals, but the ringing in his ears was flooding his head. He could barely think, let alone get up and fight three people in this condition.

It was so loud. Tommy squeezed his eyes and pushed his palms harder into the sides of his head. Everything was just *so loud*. He felt like his head was going to explode if it didn't stop. He *needed* it to *stop* being so loud. *Why was everything so loud?*

Suddenly a voice cut through the ringing and Tommy snapped his eyes open to find himself face to face with red goggles.

"I am leaving your eardrums intact so you can hear this," Shockwave's voice echoed through his head, "you're out of your league, little vigilante. Go back to fighting car thieves and bank robbers. You are *not* a hero."

Silence fell between them and sighed in relief, closing his eyes and resting his head back on the wall.

Tommy barely heard the footsteps receding as he was left alone with an empty safe across from him.

—

"-ommy! Tommy, please respond!" Tubbo's voice jerked him awake and Tommy whipped his head around in panic.

After realizing the room was empty, Tommy let his face fall into his hands. He mumbled, "I'm here, Tubbo. I'm humiliated, but I am alive."

"Thank Prime," Tubbo breathed out in relief. "*You went really quiet after Shockwave hit you.*"

"How long have I been out?"

"*Not long. Probably, like a minute or so.*"

Tommy turned to see an open window and sighed, "They're probably long gone. It's over."

It had only been about little more than a month since he had been a vigilante, but Tommy had never had a loss like this. Yeah, there may have been more than a few times where a criminal had gotten a good sucker punch in, but in the end, Tommy had always stopped them. He had always pushed through and ended the fight with a funny quip or a cool escape. He was supposed to be better than the heroes. He was supposed to be good at this. This was supposed to be his calling. He was supposed to be the friendly neighborhood vigilante.

But this time he couldn't even move as the villains got away.

He had *failed*.

"Well, I wouldn't say that," Tubbo's voice interrupted Tommy's thoughts.

"What are you talking about? One of them literally has wings, Tubbo."

"I know you're more into the punching aspects of crime fighting, but have you heard of a little thing called a tracker?"

A smile formed across Tommy's face. "How did you put a tracker on those bastards?"

"You're not the only one with tricks up your sleeves, Tommy. I slipped my prototype for a mini-drone into your pocket and when the bad guys started to leave I just activated it. They are currently flying southeast, if you start jumping now I bet you can catch up."

"Tubbo, You are the greatest command central ever!" Tommy exclaimed as he jumped up.

However, a wave of nausea washed over him. Tommy ran to the nearest waste basket and emptied the contents of his stomach.

"Listen, Tommy, if you're not up for it, you don't have to go after them. You can let the heroes just—"

"No," Tommy's voice was surprisingly low and serious for someone who had just finished throwing up. "This is my fight. I'm not giving up."

"Alright, but remember if you die, I will kill you."

"Hate to break it to you, but I am actually impossible to kill," Tommy played into the bit as he leaped out of the window and fell towards the roof of the next building.

Tubbo lightly laughed, *"Sure, Boss Man. You need to go towards the buildings on your right. What's the plan?"*

The wind whipped through Tommy's hair as he followed his roommate's instructions. "Easy. I take their bag of stolen stuff and then leave."

"That's it?"

"I'll be frank, I am not going to win a fight 3 to 1. So I'll just do what I do best! Be annoying and steal their stuff," Tommy smirked.

"But you're not Frank. You're Tommy."

"I hate you."

Tubbo's laugh buzzed in his ear as something in the distance caught Tommy's eye. The dark spot slowly moved up and down as if it was a lone bird flying in the moonlight.

Or an angel.

“Tubbo, I take it back, you’re a genius. I’ve spotted the targets,” Tommy said as he quickened his pace.

“It doesn’t seem like they’ve spotted you since they’re still moving at a pretty steady rate.”

“Is your tech able to see who has the bag?”

“Uhh,” Tubbo droned as various clicking accompanied his voice, “I can’t tell, sorry, it seems like the bug is attached to Angel’s wing so I can’t really see anything beside feathers.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy reassured as the criminals gradually increased in his vision. He was close enough that he could recognize the shapes of Shockwave and Blade hanging onto Angel. “I guess I will just have the element of surprise—”

BAM!

Tommy flew back as a hot light burst from the place that the villains had just been. He skidded across the roof and banged to the ledge. He blinked away the white light from his sight and groaned as he got back onto his feet. Tommy was officially tired of getting caught off guard.

“What was that!? I just lost contact with the tracker!” Tubbo yelled.

“I can recognize a ‘fire-fist’ a mile away,” Tommy grunted. He whipped his head around towards loud fighting sounds that came from across the roof. He ran over and peered over the ledge into the ally.

Tommy continued, “It seems like someone finally called in the heroes.”

On one side of the ally, stood a beat-up version of the villains: Shockwave standing in front of Angel who was being helped by Blade. It seemed like Angel had taken the brunt of the punch as seen by the smoke rising from his wings.

Across from the stood a man with dark hair pushed back by a white headband and with hands that were on fire.

“It’s just Blaze,” Tommy whispered. “But, I don’t get how he got up to Angel—”

Tommy’s question was swiftly answered with a flurry of purple particles bursting next to Blaze. Out of the particles stepped out the glorified green Teletubby and his cloaked sidekick.

“Ugh. Dream and Ender are here too,” Tommy scoffed.

“Well, well, well,” Dream’s voice rang out as he extended out his axe and walked towards Shockwave, stopping only when he was a few feet away from the villain. “What do we have here? An individual with wings accompanied by one individual with red goggles and another

that wields a sword? You guys sure do look like the same group of thieves that call themselves The Syndicate.”

“We have no idea what you’re talking about,” Shockwave snarled.

“I’m just trying to give you an opportunity to own up,” Dream claimed, his voice falsely soft. “Your sentence will be much worse if you resist.”

“As if you could ever catch us,” Shockwave scoffed. “You act all high and mighty, dear Number One Hero, yet you do not have a shred of proof to put any of us away. You can shove your lies back up your tight ass, green boy.”

Tommy clapped his hand over his mouth to stifle a laugh.

Dream’s voice dropped low, all compassion lost, “Remember, this was your choice.”

Without missing a beat Dream launched an attack at Shockwave. Then a sharp clang sounded out as Dream’s axe hit Blade’s sword. The two began to engage in rapid attacks, the metallic rings echoed throughout the ally.

Behind them, Ender and Blaze appeared between Angel and Shockwave in violet smoke. Blaze immediately charged at Angel with another fire-fist where Ender began to pop around Shockwave, giving him quick strikes before disappearing and appearing in another place to strike him again.

Blade was toe to toe with Dream as they engaged with such ferocity it was like they were practicing a deadly dance. However, Angel was barely fending off Blaze’s fire blasts, flying sporadically to avoid getting set ablaze. Shockwave was in a similar boat as Angel as he continuously was one step behind Ender. He spun around trying to pinpoint the cloaked hero, but every time he thought he had Ender, his vibration waves were always a second late and Ender just popped up somewhere else.

Tommy couldn’t break his eyes away from the fights, his eyes whipping back and forth trying to keep track of all of them. It was clear that villains were getting their asses handed to them.

For a second, Tommy felt a bit bad for them. He shook away the feeling immediately. Why would he feel bad for the people who had just beat the crap out of him? Not to mention these were evil people who committed crimes on a daily basis. He was a good person, he shouldn’t feel bad for people who did bad things... Right?

Tubbo’s voice buzzed in his ear, *“Okay, I know that you wanted to finish the fight with Shockwave and all, but Dream AND Blaze? It’s not worth it.”*

He didn’t want to agree with Tubbo, but his best friend was right. He had no place in this fight.

Tommy sighed, “Fine, I’ll head back.”

He began to turn away from the fight when a loud shout caught his attention.

“Blaze! Ender! Maneuver Epsilon!” Dream called out.

Tommy froze. Did he just say *Epsilon*? These were just some thieves. Epsilon was a last chance protocol. So why was Dream calling out Maneuver Epsilon when they were clearly winning the fight?

“Copy!” Blaze replied.

“Yes, sir!” Ender followed up.

Tommy pivoted back to the fight just in time to see Dream swing around his axe and, using both his feet, kick down Blade. At the same moment, Ender grabbed Shockwave by the shirt and launched him back towards Blade. The swordsman and his red-goggled partner grunted as they smashed into each other.

Dream jumped over them, disappearing in a purple flurry just as Ender did the same and appeared next to the fire hero. The sidekick grabbed Blaze and the two of them vanished and reappeared looming over and pointing weapons and fire at Shockwave and Blade.

Dream, on the other hand, reappeared in the air over Angel and landed directly on the winged villain and causing the two of them to crash into the ground. Unfazed by the fall, Dream stood up, tightly gripping one of Angel’s dark wings in his hands.

“This is your last chance, villains,” Dream yelled out as Angel tensed under his hold. “Surrender or there will be consequences.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be a hero, Dream?” Shockwave asked, “Threatening people and taking hostages doesn’t look very heroic to me.”

“It is my job to protect this city. No matter what it takes.”

SNAP.

The sound of break echoed through the ally and rattled in Tommy’s head.

Angel stifled a scream as Shockwave snapped, “You MOTHER **FU-**”

Dream interrupted, “Remember if you try to blast me, I will simply teleport away and the entire impact of your powers will hit your partner here.”

Shockwave shut his mouth and glanced over to Blade who had Blaze holding fire to his back.

At that moment, Tommy had the same realization as the villains in the ally. There was no way out of this.

They had *failed*.

“Tommy, what are you doing?!” Tubbo stressed. “Get out of there!”

This wasn't any ordinary failure though. They had lost to Dream. Stupid Green Teletubby, Dream.

Who had played dirty.

Tommy's fingers curled into fists and felt his nails dig into his palms.

Dream was supposed to be the good guy. He was a hero. Not just any hero, the Number One Hero of L'Manburg. He was revered for fighting with class and honor, finding a way to help everyone, and keeping people safe from harm.

Well, wasn't Angel a person? What about Shockwave and Blade? Yes, they had stolen something, but was that equal to being beaten black and blue by these so-called heroes? What gave Dream the right to hurt and threaten people who were clearly in a worse position than him?

If Dream was the world's definition of a hero then Tommy had no desire to be a hero.

Tommy was a vigilante. And he could help whoever the hell he wanted to.

Plus, he really enjoyed pissing off Dream.

"I am really sorry about this, Tubbo, but I'll be right back, okay?" Tommy said softly as he raised his hand to his earpiece.

"Tommy? What the hell are you—" Tubbo's voice was cut off as Tommy took out the piece and stuffed it in his pocket.

Tommy stepped onto the ledge, took a deep breath in, and did what he did best: speak without thinking.

"Did you guys really start the party without me?"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the break! Lol I was traveling and recovering and stuff but hopefully, I will have a schedule soon! I can't make any promises but I'm having fun writing this so I hope you guys enjoy reading it! (Also if you see any grammar/spelling mistakes... shhh don't worry about it)

Once again thank you so much for all your lovely comments and feedback! I've been seeing people's art of the AU as well and it's amazing! Please if you make anything send it to me on insta or Twitter! I would love to see it!!

Have a lovely day and see you in the next chapter!

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #7: Don't Forget to Bring Your Fanny Pack

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets a new accessory.

Chapter Notes

... so it seems like we have a few new readers... hi I'm Sana and I still love dialogue :)

Sorry about the wait lol I thought I could finish this chapter in a week and then... life kind of happened lol

Anyways! Thank you so much for all the love on the last chapter! I'm not able to reply to all of the comments, but I read all of them! I appreciate your kind words so much! It means the world to me <3

EDIT: I am American sooo Fanny packs are like the bags that you wear around your waist! I've been informed that British English calls these bags Bum Bags! So please excuse the British characters not saying British terms... I don't know British slang Lolol you can use your *imagination* and replace the words "Fanny packs" with "Bum Bags" if that helps Lolol sorry it pulls you out of the story but remember this is a literal au about Minecraft role play so it's okay if it's a bit silly sometimes lol

Hope you enjoy this chapter!

CW: fighting, blood-mention, repeating text, panic-mention, anxiety-mention

Please let me know if I need to tag anything else! Thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Did you guys really start the party without me?"

At once, Tommy felt all six pairs of eyes on him.

Well, if I'm going to be a dumbass, let's go all out, he thought as a smirk crawled across his face. He jumped off the ledge, landing between the two groups of heroes and villains.

"I'm hurt. You guys know how much I love hanging out in creepy alleyways in the middle of the night!" Tommy continued with pseudo-sadness in his voice. He turned towards his least favorite hero and shook his head. "I thought you knew me better, especially you, Dream."

“Get out of here, Vigilante. This conflict is none of your business,” Dream commanded.

Tommy shrugged. “You’re not wrong, but I love conflict. I also love women, but that’s a different topic.”

“Leave, before I arrest you along with these villains.”

“And that worked out *so well* last time you said that,” Tommy rolled his eyes as he stuffed his hands into his pockets. He felt around, looking for anything he could use to distract Dream, but the only thing he could feel was his earpiece. Tubbo was definitely going to kill him later.

Tommy clutched the earpiece as he continued, “Oh wait. I’m still here and not in jail.”

“Who the hell is this, Dream?” Blaze yelled.

“No one. I’m handling it. Do not move positions,” Dream slightly shifted as he still held Angel’s broken wing in his hands.

“Yeah, Blaze!” Tommy called out, “he’s *handling it*. ”

Tommy then threw his arm back and directed the earpiece’s gravity directly toward Dream’s head. Without hesitation, Dream dodged the earpiece, turning away from Tommy for a second.

And a second was all Tommy needed.

Tommy immediately launched himself at Dream, anchoring his gravity to the hero. Suddenly Tommy was face to face with Dream. Tommy stuck out his hand and hit Dream’s chest with the base of his palm. Changing his gravitational pull, the hero flew backward and slammed into a wall as Tommy skidded to a stop.

He quickly turned back to the other people in the ally to see that Blade and Shockwave had taken advantage of Tommy’s distraction and were back to fighting Blaze and Ender. Blaze was aiming fire at Blade who was jumping back and forth, dodging the attacks. Shockwave seemed to have gotten a hang of Ender’s teleportation pattern and was throwing punches and kicks right as the sidekick appeared.

However, entering a fight was not Tommy’s priority. He ran over to the winged villain who was slowly getting up.

“We don’t have much time! My powers aren’t going to hold Dream down for very long. You guys need to leave now! If you can’t fly, I can help you!” Tommy explained, his words just tumbling out.

Angel furrowed his eyebrows in confusion as he asked, “What’s the catch?”

“Catch? There is no catch! You need to leave or you’ll get thrown in jail!”

“No, what—” Angel began, but Tommy cut him off.

“We seriously don’t have time for this. I’m going to decrease your gravity and you’re going to float to that rooftop. Once you’re out of the way, your partners will follow, right?”

Angel glanced back to his fighting partners, before turning back with serious eyes, “Yes.”

Tommy placed his hand on the villain's shoulder and smiled, “Have a safe flight.”

Angel started to lift up the ground and lightly flapped his wings towards the nearest rooftop. However, Tommy was not able to enjoy his act of goodness, before he was shoved into the dirt, a knee pressing into his chest.

“What the fuck did you do to Angel?” Shockwave grabbed a fistful of Tommy’s hoodie and lifted him up.

“Nothing!” Tommy replied, looking straight into the red goggles. “I was helping him escape. I know you’re pretty fucking dense, but I suggest you do the same.”

“Why are you helping us?”

“Who the fuck cares why I’m helping?!”

“Shockwave!” Angel’s voice rang from above. Shockwave and Tommy snapped their heads up to find Angel hanging onto the ledge of the roof. “Leave him! Get out now!”

Shockwave looked back at Tommy and paused. He let out a sigh before throwing Tommy onto the ground.

The red-goggled villain turned towards his other partner who was still fighting a hero, “Blade! Let’s g—”

But before he could finish, a veil of purple particles formed next to him. Shockwave barely moved out of the way before Dream came out of the veil, swinging his axe.

Tommy scrambled back as Dream swiped at Shockwave. The villain bounced around, never countering, and only focusing on avoiding being hit. To Tommy’s left, a fireblast narrowly missed him as Blade and Blaze continued their fight. Tommy whipped his head around, looking for the third hero and Tommy’s expected opponent.

However, Tommy turned around to find Ender slowly stirring at the end of the alleyway. Tommy assumed that he had probably taken the brunt of a Shockwave attack. Even though Tommy was not the biggest fan of the sidekick, he felt a bit of empathy for him. Less than an hour ago, Tommy had been Shockwave’s latest punching bag.

Now, Tommy was helping Shockwave. Life was weird sometimes.

Suddenly a blast of heat hit the side of Tommy’s face as he turned to see Blaze aiming a stream of fire straight toward Blade. Ah yes, Blaze’s classic Flame-Thrower move. Blade quickly pivoted as the flames burned the wall next to him.

“Stay still, asshole!” Blaze turned away from Tommy as he shot more fire at Blade who kept seamlessly dodging the attacks.

Bingo. Tommy jumped up and rammed his shoulder into Blaze’s back. The fire hero toppled over and Tommy immediately increased his gravity.

“Don’t you know, Blaze? That comment is only reserved for when Blade is frustrated with me,” Tommy smirked.

However, the sword villain didn’t laugh at Tommy’s hilarious quip. Instead, Blade pulled out a knife from his belt and threw it directly at Tommy’s head. Not wanting an impromptu haircut, Tommy ducked, feeling the spin of the dagger fly over his head.

Behind him, he heard a voice yelp as the knife hit someone. The sound of metal clattered to the concrete as Tommy whipped his head around to find Dream clutching his shoulder.

“Good thing, you don’t stay still,” A deep voice stated beside him, making Tommy jump. Before Tommy could reply, Blade ran towards Shockwave who was scaling the fire escape. The criminal swordsman jumped onto the metal structure, his sword hanging in his belt and a medium-sized bag in hand.

Shit. The Pandora Labs tech.

Tommy silently scolded himself as the criminals grabbed Angel and disappeared over the rooftops. Then suddenly, he felt someone grab his wrist and turned to find Ender and his black and white mask.

Ender began to speak in a formal tone, “You are under arrest for aiding and abetting criminals—”

However, Tommy’s laugh cut him off. “You really are dumb as rocks! Remember the last time you tried to arrest me, sidekick?”

“Ender! Let go of him!” Dream shouted, but his warning was a beat too late.

Tommy placed his hand on Ender’s shoulder and decreased the sidekick’s gravity. Ender’s eyes went wide as he realized what was happening again.

“Wait! Please don’t!” Ender implored, trying to hold onto Tommy as he began to float up.

“Don’t worry! You’ll stop floating before you hit space!” Tommy kicked Ender away from himself and broke his grip. Then a smirk crawled across Tommy’s face. “Probably.”

He turned back to Dream whose green suit had a nasty red stain on the shoulder. Tommy put his hands up in defense and said, “Look, Dream, it seems like you have a lot on your plate. So I’m just going to get out of your way!”

“Why the fuck did you help the criminals escape?” Dream growled.

Tommy smiled. “I just like pissing you off. How am I doing?”

With his one good hand, Dream lifted up his axe and ran at Tommy. However, the red-hood vigilante leaped over his opponent and landed on the fire escape that lined the side of one of the walls.

“Thanks for the party! Loved the conflict, but there was a lack of women in my opinion! Hope to never see you again!” Tommy waved farewell before climbing up to the roof and leaving the three heroes with a lack of criminals or vigilantes in hand-cuffs.

The moon was high in the sky by the time Tommy made it back to his dorm room. He had gone on patrol without his phone since Tubbo was usually directing him. However since he had chucked his only form of communication with his roommate at Dream, he was left to find his way home without a GPS. Luckily Tommy was a navigation king and knew everything about directions.

So it only took him a quick hour and 45 minutes to get back. More or less.

Tommy quickly slid open the window and immediately started speaking, “I know that you’ll want to lecture me, but I have a really good reason for why I broke the earpiece!”

“I have literally nothing to say to you,” Tubbo said flatly. His roommate was sitting at his desk in the dimly lit room with his arms crossed.

Tommy had really fucked up this time.

“Would it help if I said that I was successful in pissing off Dream?”

Tubbo rolled his eyes and began to turn around.

Tommy stuck out his hands, waving for his best friend’s attention, “Wait! Wait, Tubbo! I am so sorry! Seriously! I honestly didn’t plan to join the fight, but then... um...” Tommy’s voice trailed off.

“You just needed to piss off Dream so much that you had to put your life in danger?” Tubbo retorted.

“No,” Tommy’s voice had fallen quiet. “He started threatening the criminals, even though they were cornered. You know Angel? The guy with wings? Dream snapped one of his wings for no reason. Well, I guess he did have a reason: he’s a giant dick with an ego problem.”

Tubbo paused, processing Tommy’s words.

Tommy continued, “I know it was stupid, but I just—”

“You couldn’t stand around doing nothing. Yeah, I know, Tommy,” his best friend finished with a soft smile. “You’re the most selfish but also selfless dumbass I know.”

“I am a man of many talents,” Tommy smiled. “But seriously, I am sorry about the communicator. I didn’t have anything else on me to throw at Dream!”

“You threw my tech at Dream?!”

“I had no choice!” Tommy went on to explain the rest of the fight and in no way exaggerated how cool he was the whole time. By the time he finished telling Tubbo about his tales of getting lost in the middle of Logstedshire, sunlight began to seep through the window.

BEEEEEP BEEEEEP

The two of them jumped at the sudden noise coming from Tubbo’s phone.

“I guess I’m going to be chugging at least 3 cups of coffee at work today,” Tubbo sighed as he turned off the alarm.

A wave of exhaustion rolled over Tommy as he realized that he would probably have to do the same. Maybe staying up all night after getting into multiple fights wasn’t the greatest move.

As if Prime had heard his silent prayers, Tommy’s phone began to ring. He lifted it up to see it was Techno.

He answered, “Hello?”

“Phil wanted me to let you know that the store is closed today. You have the day off,” Techno’s indifferent voice replied.

Tommy silently pumped his fist before replying with fake enthusiasm, “Oh that sucks! I was so excited to work! What happened?”

“Sure you were,” Tommy could practically hear Techno roll his eyes over the phone. “Phil is sick and he doesn’t want to make anyone else sick.”

“Oh dang, I’m sorry to hear that. Could you tell him that I hope he feels better?”

“I’ll let him know. See ya tomorrow,” And before Tommy could reply Techno had hung up the call.

Tommy flopped on his bed and began to get comfortable. He was going to enjoy his day off by getting 12 hours of sleep.

“Let me guess, you got the day off,” Tubbo said as he began to pack up his stuff.

Tommy hummed in agreement as he buried his face into his pillow. If Tubbo had said anything else, he hadn’t heard it as his fatigue pulled him under.

-

The first thing Tommy noticed was how cold the floor was. He curled his toes in, trying to preserve the feeling in his freezing feet. He had been standing barefoot for a while, but he didn't complain. He never complained. He wanted this. He was doing a good thing.

The second thing he noticed was the two men arguing in front of him. They hadn't been arguing long. Not as long as he had been standing on the ice-cold tiled floor with no socks. Socks weren't allowed. They didn't help. Tommy wanted to help. So he didn't wear socks.

"Why is still he here, ---?" voiced a man with dark hair and white-rimmed glasses who stood in front of him.

The other man across the room turned around. His face was cloudy, but his voice rang clear.

"You know why. He's the key."

The dark-hair man laughed coldly. "Look at him. You can't keep pushing him like this. This method is clearly not working anymore! Are you going to risk everything we've worked for this child?"

Tommy felt his nails dig into his palms. If he had laser eyes there would be a hole in the back of the dark-haired man's head by now. He was not a child. He was helping. He was strong. He could keep going.

"Yes. Yes, I am, ---. He can do this." The cloudy face man replied. He then turned his faceless head towards Tommy. "Right?"

Tommy rapidly nodded his head and answered, "Yes, sir. I can do this."

"See, ---. Even he agrees," The cloudy face man looked back at the dark-haired man.

The dark-haired man just shook his head in disappointment. But Tommy didn't care if that man didn't believe in him. --- believed in him. That's all that mattered.

"Move out the way," The cloudy face man continued. "We have work to do."

"Whatever," the man said as he began to walk away, "Don't blame me when you fail because you decided to use some kid instead of years of research."

He was wrong though. Tommy wouldn't fail. He was not a failure. He would prove to everyone that he could do this. He had a purpose. He was here to help. He had to help.

Tommy was now left alone with the cloudy face man. The man slowly walked up to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

“One more time. Okay?” the man’s voice was soft as if he actually cared about Tommy. It was the same voice he used the last four times he had said this sentence.

Tommy didn’t mind. — was just pushing him to be stronger. Tommy needed to be strong.

“One more time,” Tommy echoed.

The man stepped multiple steps back and said, “Remember to ground yourself.”

“Yes sir.”

He slightly shifted his feet, allowing the little warmth he had left to abandon the soles of his feet. The coldness slowly crawled up his legs. He was okay. The numbness filled his torso and his chest. He clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering as he squeezed his eyes. The coldness was now inching along his outstretched arms. He was almost there. The icy sensation finally touched his fingertips.

Now.

He clawed into the air with everything he had, his body burning as his arms pulled against every force known to mankind. He could do this. He needed to do this.

A scream ripped out of his throat.

-

“-ommy! Tommy!” someone yelled as they shook his shoulder.

Tommy’s eyes snapped open and shot up, but his back screamed in pain. Tommy let out an involuntary groan as he realized his whole body was aching.

“Hey, are you okay?” A quiet voice asked beside him. Tommy craned his stiff neck to see Ranboo standing a few steps away from his bed.

“Agh, what are you talking about?” Tommy croaked out as the sweat drenching his body made him shiver.

“You were screaming,” Ranboo stated. “I didn’t know if—”

“I’m fine,” Tommy interrupted, his voice rough. “It was just a dream.”

Or something like that , Tommy thought.

“Oh.”

His least favorite roommate paused, letting an uncomfortable silence fall between the two of them.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Ranboo finally asked breaking the quiet.

“I said I’m fine, Ran-boob. It’s none of your business,” Tommy replied stiffly.

“Okay...” Ranboo trailed off and paused as if he was trying to find the words to make this conversation less awkward. He was not successful as he continued, “I’m gonna just go now. I just swung by to pick up some clothes.”

“I don’t care,” Tommy stated emotionless.

“Oh. Um, sorry...” Ranboo sheepishly apologized and turned away to his side of the room.

Tommy dug back into his covers in an attempt to shake off the coldness that numbed his aching body. Squeezing his eyes together he tried to piece together the thoughts that ping-ponged around his head.

Why had he been screaming? Was it because of his dream? If it was making him scream it was probably more of a nightmare. Honestly, Tommy didn’t even remember most of it. There were two men, but he couldn’t remember their faces or their voices. All he remembered was the feeling. The feeling of being so incredibly cold that it was as if he was also burning at the same time. The feeling of not wanting to stop. The feeling of not being able to stop.

A pain stabbed at the back of his head and Tommy decided to let go of the endless questions. At this point, every atom in his body was aching and all he wanted to do was to sleep.

However, this time, Prime was not so kind to him. He spent the next thirty minutes twisting and turning in his bed, his mind far too awake for his weary body.

Tommy reluctantly got up, squinting in the late sun that had spread across the room. Tubbo was probably going to come back soon, but he wasn’t completely sure.

He dragged his hands along his face. Tubbo had weirdly reacted well to the events of last night. There was a little bit of lecturing whenever Tommy recounted his dangerous acts, but overall Tubbo had forgiven him pretty quickly for his stupidity.

A pang of guilt hit him in the gut as looked at his phone messages.

Tubbo: Hey, are you alright? Ranboo texted me saying that you weren’t feeling well

I trust Tubbo, Tommy thought. I can tell him about the dream.

Tommy quickly typed out a reply and hit send.

Tommy: I’m fine! RanBOOB was just being dramatic

Shit.

His phone vibrated as Tubbo replied.

Tubbo: Whatever you say, Boss Man! Hope you're enjoying your day off... I'm not jealous at all :) I hope your pillow is very warm :)

Tommy rolled his eyes as he sent back a smile emoji, echoing Tubbo's friendly passive aggressiveness. He sighed as he stuffed his phone back into his pocket and headed to the showers to wash off the sweat that stuck to his back.

Texting just wasn't a good way to talk about the dream. Tommy decided he would tell Tubbo about it in person when he came back tonight. That was a good plan. He still trusted Tubbo.

Tommy ignored the pit in his stomach.

After taking a much-needed warm and long shower, Tommy came back to his room to find his best friend typing away at his computer.

"Hey Big T! When did you come back?" Tommy greeted, his wet hair still dripping onto his shirt and anxiety settling at the back of his throat.

"Not too long ago," Tubbo shrugged. "Sorry, I'm just finishing up this report for Sam real quick."

"Take your time! Honestly, you must be so tired—"

Tubbo dramatically pressed a final key and yelled out "Done! I'm not that tired actually! I've had like six cups of coffee today, so I need to burn out all the caffeine before I can sleep."

"Oh, okay..." Tommy trailed off. "So Tubbo, I actually wanted to talk to you about something."

Tubbo turned towards him, "I actually wanted to talk to you about something too."

"Great! You can go first!" Tommy quickly volunteered. He wasn't stalling.

"Well," Tubbo's tone became serious, "I'm going, to be honest, Tommy, I was really annoyed by your stunt last night."

"Please, know I am so sorry—"

Tubbo put his hand up and continued, "I know you're sorry. You said it like 14 times last night. I understand why you did it. It's also unfair of me to hold a grudge when neither of us really know what we're doing with this whole vigilante thing."

"Well, I think I kind of know—"

"You got lost for two hours in Logstedshire last night after getting your ass handed to you," Tubbo said flatly.

"Semantics," Tommy huffed.

“What I’m trying to say is that next time at least just warn me if you're going to throw your only form of communication with me at Dream? Is that fair?”

“Yeah, that’s pretty fair,” Tommy agreed. Tubbo was such an understanding friend. Tommy didn’t deserve him. He was such a great—

“Also in order to make up for your fuckery last night, you have to wear this during all your patrols from now on,” Tubbo said as he threw a bright pink bag at him.

Tommy held up the small pink bag by its two straps with a frown, “Is this a fanny pack?”

“Yep. I picked it up at the corner shop. You can put all the extra supplies I give you since you are *so* adamant about breaking my tech,” Tubbo stated smugly.

“Why is it pink?”

“That was the only color left,” A smile full of bullshit forming on his roommate’s face.

“That is fucking lie!” Tommy exclaimed.

Tubbo shrugged. “You do stupid shit, these are the consequences. You are a team player, right?”

Tommy crossed his arms and grumbled, “Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes... I am a team player.”

“Glad to hear it, Boss Man,” Tubbo was beaming as he turned to his computer. “Alright, Fanny pack-Man you ready for a Sunday night patrol?”

“I swear to Prime that better not stick,” Tommy mumbled as he changed into his vigilante gear, fanny pack included.

“Wait,” Tubbo turned back to Tommy, “Didn’t you want to tell me something too?”

Tommy's voice got caught in his throat.

Even though his best friend was making him wear this dumb fanny pack, Tubbo really did deserve better than Tommy. He already had to keep Tommy’s vigilante secret while also being his accomplice in his vigilantism. He didn’t need to give him more reasons to worry about Tommy. Especially when this dream thing was probably a one-time thing.

“Tommy?”

“Nah, I just wanted to say sorry for the 16th time for last night.”

Tubbo laughed, “If you keep on saying sorry, I’m going to start mistaking you for Ranboo.”

“Do not compare me to that weirdo!”

“Says the guy who’s wearing a pink fanny pack.”

“I will send you to space.”

“Yet even from that height, I will probably still see your fanny pack.”

“You’re the one who bought it!”

—

Tommy skidded across the gravel roof, eventually stopping right before the edge. He took a step but frowned as he felt a poke at the sole of his foot.

“You know what? I think this fanny pack is messing up my balance,” Tommy said as he pulled off his sneaker and began to shake it.

“Really? I think I just figured out something too,” Tubbo buzzed in his ear.

“What?” A small rock clattered as it fell out of the shoe.

“You have two superpowers: controlling gravity and complaining.”

“I cannot believe you are denying my feelings! I think this fanny pack is really messing with me! I just found a rock in my shoe!”

“Oh, no. A rock in your shoe. How awful,” Tubbo’s voice dripped with sarcasm.

“This is gaslighting. You are gaslighting me,” Tommy pointed out as he slipped the shoe back on and began to jump across buildings again.

“Define gaslighting.”

“I know what gaslighting means! *You* define gaslighting!” The night wind brushed back his hair as he leaped.

“Mhm. Sure you know what gaslighting means.”

“Where’s Dream? I need to throw this communicator at him.”

“As if you would ever approach Dream voluntarily,” Tubbo scoffed.

“I’ll give you that one. I actively avoid Dream, but he just keeps finding me,” Tommy frowned.

“Maybe the pink fanny pack will help you blend in?”

“I’m going to go back to calling you Tech Support Tubbo.”

“You can call me whatever you want, Fanny Pack-Man.”

“I swear if I see that name posted anywhere—”

However, before Tommy could finish his threat, a scream rang through the air. A few seconds later, multiple gunshots were let off.

Tommy whipped around, heading straight towards the direction of the sounds.

“Any reports near East Elm Street? I heard someone scream and gunshots,” Tommy questioned.

“No. Nothing has been reported tonight, but there are previous records of gang activity in that area so be careful.”

“Okay. Keep me updated, Tech Support.”

“Always, Fanny Pack-Man.”

Tommy jumped across buildings until he was on the outskirts of Logstedshire. A large rail yard surrounded him as he leaped onto one of the parked cargo trains.

The rows and rows of trains reminded him of the tops of the bookcases when he would climb to the top of the ladder at the store. The spaces between the tops were left open, making up a maze that was easily decipherable from above but near impossible to the ones lost in those crevasses. This time though there wasn't an annoying Wilbur chiding him to come down.

“Okay, so I'm where all the trains from math problems live. But I'm not really seeing any screaming people or guns.”

Before his tech support could reply, a loud creak came from behind Tommy. He spun around to see a figure in the distance.

Tommy held his hands up in defense as he called out, “Hey! Are you okay? I heard someone screaming and gunshots.”

The figure said nothing as they began to step forward, slowly appearing in Tommy's vision. The figure was a man with light hair who wore a white zipped-up jacket with a gold necklace hanging from his neck. However, Tommy wasn't hung up on the fact the man wasn't the most fashionable person at the rail yard. Instead, he was focused on the man's eyes.

They were glowing red.

Tommy took a step back as he felt the hairs on the back of his neck raise. This guy was bad news.

“Vigilante,” the man stated in a low voice. “You will be coming with me.”

Cool. Cool. Cool. So the scary man knew Tommy. That was super cool. Tommy was extremely cool with this information.

“Did he just say that he wanted you to come with him?” Tubbo voice whispered in his ear, making Tommy jerk in surprise.

The sudden noise, along with his unstable stance on the metal roof of the train made Tommy lose his footing. He slipped off the train and smacked the dirt with his back.

“Sorry, that one was on me,” Tubbo apologized softly. Tommy blamed the fanny pack.

Tommy groaned in response as he pushed himself up to his knees. He took a deep breath in before letting out to see it form into misty whisps in front of him. The temperature around him suddenly dropped multiple degrees and a shiver shook his body.

Tommy snapped his head up to see a white frost quickly crawling towards him.

Tommy cursed loudly as he jumped up and ran in the opposite direction of the growing frost. The ice was now crystalizing the sides of the trains, removing the option of getting to the tops of the trains and leaving him to maneuver the maze of trains.

“The guy has fucking ice powers!” Tommy panted as he weaved through breaks of the rows, the ice barely nipping the back of his shoes.

“Ice powers? We don’t have any heroes with ice powers in L’Manburg!”

“I have a feeling that the guy who wants to kidnap me might not be a hero! Plus he has red eyes! That’s fucking weird, right?”

“Maybe it’s genetic?” Tubbo offered.

“I don’t give a shit if it’s genet– OOF” His left foot suddenly went stiff and Tommy fell to the ground, face first.

He turned to see his foot covered in a sheet of ice. He immediately started kicking at the ice but the coldness was slowly creeping up his leg.

His chest tighten at the thought of the coldness covering his whole body. The thought of the burning.

“No, no, no,” Tommy’s breath began to quicken and he struggled to chip off the ice that bolted him to the ground. He tried to decrease his gravity, but his foot stayed put as the rest of his body slightly lifted off the dirt.

“Do not worry. The ice does not hurt,” the man spoke calmly as he strolled up to Tommy.

“Fuck off,” Tommy hissed through gritted teeth.

“I’ve called the police, Tommy! Just hang on for a few more minutes!” Tubbo’s frantic voice stressed in his ear.

But Tommy didn’t have a few minutes. Since the man had come closer, the ice was growing faster along Tommy’s leg and had grown past his knee.

Tommy was now scrapping at the ice with his hands to little avail. His fingertips stung as he dug his nails into the cold crystals. Recognizing the familiar feeling, he pulled his hands back and he went back to kicking.

“Do not resist, Vigilante. The Egg has requested your presence. This is an honor,” the man’s voice was as cold as the air around them.

“What the fuck do eggs have to with this?” Tommy snarled as ice now was forming on his other leg. “Let me go! I have nothing to do with dumb fucking eggs!”

“That is not true. The Egg believes that you are the key.”

Tommy went rigid. *The Key*.

“What?” his voice had gone quiet.

“All will be explained in time, Vigilante. You have been chosen for a great role. Once you have been transpo—”

A laugh echoed loudly throughout the rail yard. Tommy and the ice-man snapped their heads up to the trail tops. Standing in the moonlight was an individual with a long black coat and curly hair. Something caught Tommy’s eye as he craned his neck. Their new guest had goggles.

Red goggles.

There was no fucking way.

“Why is the personification of a freezer going off about eggs, Vigilante?” Shockwave questioned loudly.

Tommy was speechless.

However, the ice-man was not. “You have no reason to be here. Leave.”

“On the contrary, I actually do have a good reason to be here. You see, I also needed to talk to the little Vigilante tonight,” Shockwave said as he pointed at Tommy.

Tommy couldn’t move. He wasn’t sure if it was because of the ice that covered his torso now or the fact that he was in shock.

“I understand you have all this,” Shockwave waved his hand, gesturing at the ice that covered the ground and Tommy, “but I really need to borrow him. Honestly, he’s really fucking annoying so it would be my pleasure to take him off your hands.”

Apparently, the ice-man did not agree with Shockwave and instead outstretched his hand, sending out a blast of ice at the red-goggled villain.

Shockwave didn’t move an inch besides lifting his hand.

SNAP

The ice blast was instantly countered by an invisible force. It slammed back into its owner, sending the man flying past dozens of train cars in a flurry of ice shards.

“I even asked nicely,” Shockwave muttered as he landed next to Tommy.

Tommy looked at him with wide eyes and forced his voice out, “The- The police are coming.”

“Do you really want to be here when the police get here?” Shockwave asked as he gently placed his hands on the ice that wrapped around Tommy’s body. Then he felt a soft vibration pulsate through his cold cage.

Suddenly multiple cracks started to form in the ice. Then all at once, the ice broke apart, falling to the ground in shavings and Tommy tumbled onto his hands and knees.

A soft whisper escaped his mouth, “Woah.”

“I know. I am very awesome. You can thank me later,” Shockwave bragged as he grabbed Tommy’s arm and lifted him to his feet. His knees buckled slightly as he focused on standing.

“I didn’t say anything!” Tommy denied.

“I control vibrations, dumbass. Meaning I also have really good hearing.”

Tommy paused.

“Do you eavesdrop on people peeing?” Tommy finally asked.

“Oh my Prime,” Shockwave groaned. “We don’t have time for this. We need to leave before your ice friend and/or the police come.”

“He’s not my friend!”

“I don’t give a shit,” Shockwave slightly ducked and grabbed Tommy by the waist, lifting him onto his shoulder in one swift motion.

“WHAT THE HELL—” Tommy began to shout.

“You can’t walk and I can’t talk to you here.”

Shockwave wasn’t completely wrong as Tommy was slowly gaining feeling back into his legs. That didn’t stop him from beating his fist on the villain’s back.

“Put me the fuck down!”

In the distance, Tommy heard faint wails of sirens. However, at the same time, he began to see his breath again.

“The Egg does not stand for disobedience!” yelled the ice-man as he came out from the shadows.

“We can leave now,” Tommy admitted softly.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” Shockwave mumbled, annoyance filling his voice. He swiftly turned away from the cold and ran towards the exit of the rail yard.

—

Shockwave finally put him down when they reached the docks. The waves were crashing loudly as they hit the concrete that lines the water. Tommy rubbed his legs trying to give them some warmth while gazing out at the sparkling water. Next to him Shockwave sat down with a thump, slightly panting.

“You weigh the same as a bag of sticks, like what are they feeding you, kid?” Shockwave asked still catching his breath.

“I actually decreased my gravity that whole time. I just assumed you were too weak to carry a giant man like me,” Tommy replied.

Shockwave groaned as he shook his head.

The two of them fell silent as the waves of the sea filled the air between them.

Tommy fiddled with his hoodie strings as he waited for Shockwave to speak again. His mind buzzed with questions as if it had just caught up with everything that had happened.

He was almost kidnapped by a crazy ice-powered psycho? But then he was saved by Shockwave? One of the villains that he saved yesterday? And now he was causally sitting next to said villains as if they were about to share a nice seashore picnic?

“Um? *Is everything okay? Are you still with Shockwave?*” Tubbo’s familiar voice whispered in his ear.

Tommy was thankful to hear his roommate’s voice, but there was no way to answer him without signaling to Shockw—

“You should probably answer the person in your ear before they think you’re dead,” the red-goggled criminal commented.

“What are you talking about?” Tommy asked in an attempt to act ignorant.

“I can hear the vibrations coming from your left ear. With the sea, I don’t know exactly what they said, but I can assume that if you have someone talking in your ear, they’re probably

your partner. And you haven't been able to talk to them since you've been with me for the past half hour. Right?"

Apparently, Tommy's frown gave Shockwave all the confirmation he needed as he let out a soft laugh.

"It's your choice. You either speak to them now or you speak to them later after you throw your earpiece into the sea."

"I am not throwing away my earpiece!" Tommy snapped back.

Shockwave put up his hands. "You can break it, you can feed it to a bird, I don't care what you do with it, but I need to talk to you alone. And that means your little earworm can't listen in."

"This guy is the fucking worst," Tubbo said flatly.

"You can say that again," Tommy agreed with his roommate.

"Your partner can't listen?" Shockwave repeated.

"I wasn't talking to you, dick," Tommy retorted back at Shockwave.

"Oh my Prime, can you simply just get rid of the earpiece? I have been waiting all night to talk to you and at this point, it is going to be morning by the time we have a conversation," Shockwave replied, crossing his arms in annoyance.

Tommy paused as he attempted to think of a solution that did not end up with him getting murdered by his roommate because he broke his tech two days in a row.

"Hey Command Central, you can only hear the things I hear, right?" Tommy asked quietly, turning away from the villain.

"Yeah, the speaker only picks up sounds in its immediate vicinity."

"Great! Don't worry, I'm not breaking the earpiece, Boss Man. Trust me, I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Why are you talking to him? Didn't this guy almost kill you yesterday?"

"True, but then he saved me from being kidnapped ten minutes ago!"

"Only because you saved him for some reason yesterday after he tried bursting your eardrums!"

Tommy glanced back at the villain. He sat unmoving, his goggles reflecting the rippling water. Maybe it was adrenaline from almost being an ice pop or maybe the fact that Shockwave just looked like a regular guy in this moonlight, but Tommy didn't have any reserves about talking to the villain.

“I think I should hear him out. He said he was looking for me all night.”

Tubbo sighed, *“If you don’t report back to me in fifteen minutes, I’m sending the police to your location.”*

“I wouldn’t expect anything less. I’ll talk to you in fifteen,” Tommy replied before pulling the earpiece out of his ear and shoving it into his fanny pack. Surprisingly it had survived the ice attack and was still latched on Tommy’s waist.

Tommy clicked off the waist pouch and slid it away from himself. It clanged softly against an empty shipping container a few meters away from them.

“Remember when I made that shipping container fall towards you?” Tommy smiled as he turned back to the red-goggled villain.

Shockwave rubbed his temples. “I’d rather not.”

“You were so pissed! You were screaming like a little...” Tommy’s voice fell flat as Shockwave stood up, his coat fluttering behind him in the sea breeze.

Another awkward pause came between them. Tommy mindlessly began to pull at his hoodie strings again. A silent wave of worry washed over him, making him grit his teeth.

Maybe Tubbo was right. He should have ran away when Shockwave put him down. Why was he even giving him the time? This man was a known criminal! He had broken into multiple secure facilities and stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars! He could have murdered someone for that money! Was he currently sitting next to a murderer? Maybe Shockwave had saved him just to kill him. Didn’t he mention that he wanted to kill him the first time they met? Maybe if Tommy could just touch another shipping container—

“So why’d you do it?” The villain’s deep voice cut through Tommy’s thoughts.

Tommy kept staring at his hoodie strings. “Did what?”

“Why did you save us from Dream last night?”

Tommy liked that the strings were red. “I just really hate the color green.”

“You hate the color green so much that you risked your life for the same people who had just beat the shit out of you?”

Tommy liked red. It was his favorite color. Or maybe blue was his favorite color. He wasn’t sure. What did Tommy even like? What did Tommy even know about himself? What was he even doing?

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as an ache began to form behind his forehead.

“Vigilante,” Shockwave’s voice was sharp now.

“I don’t know!” Tommy snapped back loudly. Realizing that this man could shatter his ear drums at any moment, Tommy crossed his arms and continued with a softer voice, “I don’t know why I saved you guys. You needed help and I help people.”

“Even if those people are wanted criminals?”

“I don’t care about criminals or heroes or whatever. I save whoever I want.”

Shockwave hummed in response. A beat passed allowing the sounds of the waves to take over the air again.

“Well, whatever your reasoning, the Syndicate owes you one,” Showave shuffled around in his pocket before pulling out a small card and holding it out to Tommy.

Tommy stared at the card and scoffed, “I don’t want to join your evil boy band.”

“Just take the card,” A smile pulled at Tommy’s lips as he heard the annoyance drip from Shockwave’s voice. “If you ever need help, just call the number here.”

“It’s kind of presumptuous of you to assume I will ever need your help.”

“I literally just saved you from becoming an ice cube.”

“For your information, I was perfectly fine before you came! Honestly, you messed up my incredible escape plan!”

“Calling the police?” Shockwave cocked his head to the side.

“That was only one part of the escape plan,” Tommy huffed.

“Whatever you say, Vigilante. I’ll throw that rescue on the house if you just take the card. Angel will kill me if I go back without giving it to you,” Shockwave admitted.

Tommy sighed and plucked the white card from Shockwave’s fingers. The only thing that was on it was a row of numbers written in black ink.

“Is this all you wanted to talk about?” Tommy asked, starting to get up.

“Well, the card is from Angel. He wanted to thank you for helping him, especially with the wing situation. But Blade also wanted to give you something.”

The villain then threw a small object into the air. Tommy caught it and realized it was a small glass bottle filled with a viscous goo.

“It’s a healing gel. Blade apologizes for the cut,” he continued pointing at his own face.

Tommy lifted his hand to his own face, feeling a long scab that had formed on his cheek. Honestly, Tommy had forgotten about it. It hadn’t been that big of a concern compared to the bruises that covered the rest of his body.

“How do I know this isn’t poison?” Tommy probed, turning the bottle upside down and then right side up again.

“Why the fuck would I poison you? I just saved you!”

“It seems like a pretty criminal move. The classic ‘save and then murder’ tactic,” Tommy shrugged.

Suddenly as if they were back at the rail yard, Shockwave’s voice went cold. “I am not a murderer. I might steal things, but I don’t murder people.”

Tommy shifted uncomfortably in the sudden tone shift. “Okay... Going on... What the hell is this stuff made of anyways?”

“Don’t ask,” Shockwave replied flatly.

“Now I definitely don’t want to put this on myself, let alone an open wound.”

“For Prime’s sake, you are so fucking annoying,” Shockwave stuck his hand behind his back and pulled out a knife.

“What the fuck, dude!?” Tommy yelped, “It was a joke!”

“Chill out,” Shockwave deadpanned. “I’m showing you how the gel works.”

“Oh,” Tommy’s shoulders relaxed a bit, still uneasy by the knife in the criminal’s hand.

Shockwave pressed the sharp edge into his palm until specks of blood began to form. He put the knife back into his belt and then held out his hand towards Tommy. Tommy handed him the bottle and the villain popped off the top and poured a bit of the gel onto his open cut.

Immediately, the cut began to stitch itself back together. Shockwave held out his hurt hand and Tommy watched in awe as the cut healed within seconds.

The red-goggled man threw the bottle back at Tommy. “It’s not poison. Just don’t ask where it’s from.”

“I would like you to know my mind is currently in the gutter,” Tommy confessed. “I am thinking of the worst thing it could possibly be.”

Shockwave sighed in disappointment. “It is not the bodily fluid that comes from a male genitalia.”

Tommy stifled a laugh and tried to continue with a serious voice, “T- Thank you for the clarification.”

“You are a literal child. I cannot believe I am talking to a child.”

Tommy’s humor was quickly replaced by anger. “I am NOT a child! I am a very grown-up MAN!”

“Mhm, because adults always refer to themselves as *grown-up men* .”

“Fuck you,” Tommy huffed.

Shockwave pressed the bridge of his nose. “I still have one more thing I want to tell you. Could you please just let me finish?”

“No one’s stopping you.”

“No one’s stopping me?! YOU ARE—” Shockwave quickly cut himself off. He let out a deep breath and restarted more calmly, “Angel and Blade wanted me to send you their thanks. But I also wanted to thank you. If you hadn’t jumped in... well, let's just say it wouldn’t have ended well for us.”

“It’s weird that you’re being nice to me. I don’t like it.”

“SHUT— ehm— Listen, Vigilante, I wasn’t kidding when I was saying that you’re out of your league. If you want to play with the real bad guys, you can’t rely on dodging all the attacks that come your way. I’ll be completely transparent with you. You’re a shit fighter.”

“Insulting me is a weird way to thank me for saving your ass.”

His red goggles flashed the moonlight as he lightly laughed. “You kind of suck right now, but you have potential. You’re powerful, but you don’t know how to use your strength effectively.”

“So?” Tommy tapped his finger in annoyance on his crossed arms.

“So, I’m going to teach you how to fight.”

Chapter End Notes

listen... I was raised by Percy Jackson... I love a good cliffhanger :D
(pssst also if you see any spelling mistakes shhhhh don't worry about it)

Funny note about this chapter: I couldn't think of a power for Punz for a while. But then I remembered his Minecraft skin has a gold necklace... meaning he's iced out... lolololol I humor myself :D

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #8: Sometimes Swords are Sharp

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets a new teacher and a cool new scar.

Chapter Notes

Tw: blood, wounds

please let me know if I need to tag anything else!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I’m going to teach you how to fight,” Shockwave stated as he crossed his arms.

Tommy burst out laughing.

“You know what, Shockwave. Maybe you are a bit funny,” he finally croaked out after catching his breath.

“I am not joking! I want to teach you how to fight!” Shockwave replied, annoyance returning to his tone.

“And who says I want to learn how to fight from a boomer?”

“Did you just call me a boomer? Are you like 10?”

“I cannot confirm or deny that information.”

Shockwave took a deep sigh. “Vigilante, I’m trying to do something nice. Why can’t you let me just do something nice?”

“I’m not sure offering to beat me up is considered something nice,” Tommy raised his eyebrow.

“I’m offering to teach you how to not get beat up!”

“Okay, so how are you planning to do that?”

Shockwave paused. “By practicing…” his voice trailed off.

“I knew it! You just want an excuse to beat me up! All because I threw a shipping container at you *one time* !”

“I thought you made it *fall* towards me.”

“Fuck off. I am leaving,” Tommy twisted around and began to walk back towards his fanny pack.

“What are you going to do when you can’t touch your opponent?” Shockwave yelled out.

Tommy ignored him. It wasn’t worth it.

“What about if your opponent moves as fast as you? What if they use long-distance attacks?” The criminal went on.

Shockwave was trying to get a reaction out of Tommy. He was doing great as a vigilante. Who cares if his enemies have different powers? His dodging and escaping tactics had been working so far. He didn’t need any more help.

“What happens when surprise attacks aren’t working? What will you do when someone you care about is being threatened? Are you going to just escape? Are you going to leave them behind just to save your own skin?”

Tommy’s fingers curled into fists as he continued forward. Shockwave didn’t know Tommy.

“Would you not stand up and fight? Are you really that big of a *coward* ?”

Tommy spun around, anger heating up his face. “You know *nothing* about me!”

“I know you would burn the world down for the ones you cared about.”

“Oh yeah? And how the fuck do you know that?” Tommy sneered.

“Because I would do the same thing.”

A beat passed between the two of them. The waves of the sea still crashed loudly beside them. Tommy could easily still leave. All he had to do was turn around and walk away from Shockwave. There was no reason to be involved with him. He was a part of a crime group that was hunted by Dream for Prime’s sake! It would be ridiculous to learn how to fight from a man that barely left him conscious barely 24 hours ago.

Tommy’s words tumbled out, “Hypothetically if I were to agree to you teaching me, *hypothetically* what would you even teach me? Again this is hypothetical! I have not agreed to anything.”

Tommy was a dumbass, wasn’t he?

“Well, *hypothetically* , you’d focus on learning techniques that would help you not rely on your powers so much. You’re quick, but you’re also lazy.”

“Let me guess,” Tommy rolled his eyes, “you know this because you’re also lazy.”

“I *was* lazy. Now I’m efficient,” Shockwave pointed out.

“That’s just a fancy way of saying you’re still lazy!”

Shockwave shrugged. “At least I know martial arts.”

“Aren’t you the guy that is in charge of breaking into safes? Why isn’t your partner, you know the one with the sword, teaching me? He seems more qualified than you.”

“Are you purposely trying to piss me off?” Shockwave asked tiredly.

“I thought that was already established,” Tommy smiled.

Shockwave shook his head as he rubbed his temples. “At this point, I’d rather be rotting in jail than trying to convince a child that he needs training.”

“I am *not* a child!” Tommy fumed.

“Right now you’re acting like one!” Shockwave snapped back. “Vigilante. I can’t force you to accept my offer. It is your choice. However, I am being honest with you when I say that if you continue the way you’re headed as a vigilante in this city, it’s not going to end well.”

Tommy focused fiddling with his hoodie strings. He rolled the metal bit at the end between his fingers. What was this thing called again? An aglet? That sounded wrong. But it could be right. What was right anymore? What was the right thing to do? How was he supposed to know what was right?

Shockwave let out a deep sigh and began to turn away from Tommy. “It’s alright if you don’t want to work together. I get it. I’m a thief. Why would you trust me? Whatever, forget it. See you around, Vigilante.”

Tommy should let him leave. Shockwave was right. Why should he trust a guy who almost burst his eardrums, but then also saved him from an ice-powered kidnapper and then thanked Tommy for helping him and his partners?

At one point in time though, Tommy trusted a man in a green hoodie.

“Well...” Tommy voiced and Shockwave hesitated. “*Technically* you could’ve completely destroyed my hearing, but you didn’t.” Tommy shrugged. “That seems pretty trustworthy to me.”

The thief slowly faced the vigilante again.

“I’ll agree to one training session with you,” Tommy said as he held up his index finger. Then a smirk crawled across his face. “But then after that, I want the guy with the sword to teach me. I can’t be seen near a boomer like you for too long.”

“I am not even a boomer!”

“Okay, okay,” Tommy put his hands up in defense. “Sheesh. The millennial in you is really coming out right now.”

“You don’t know how old I am.”

“Your vibes just seem old.”

“At least I don’t have a bedtime.”

Tommy was about to give an epic comeback, but suddenly he spotted flashes of blue and red out of the corner of his eye. Shit. Tubbo.

“I guess that’s your little partner calling you home,” Shockwave snickered.

“Die,” Tommy was an expert at comebacks.

Shockwave chuckled before asking, “First session tomorrow? Same place and time?”

“Without the ‘picking me up and running away from a guy with ice powers’ part, right?”

“It’s not my fault if dudes who are obsessed with omelets are following you. See ya later, Vigilante,” The red-goggled criminal then gave a two-fingered salute and ran into the shadows, disappearing from Tommy’s vision.

“You didn’t answer my question!” Tommy shouted, but Shockwave was already gone.

The sirens were getting louder now, a kind signal from his roommate that he had gone over his fifteen-minute time limit. Tommy scooped up his pink bag and headed in the opposite direction of the police lights.

—

As Tommy jumped along the building he filled in Tubbo on what happened during his conversation with Shockwave. Tubbo scolded him for a bit for not leaving after fifteen minutes, but in Tommy’s defense, Shockwave was being a total asswipe for most of the time. Tommy did nothing that was instigating at all.

“So he just gave you a card and jar of magic healing cream?” Tubbo’s voice buzzed in his ear after Tommy had finished explaining. *“That seems awfully nice for a guy who wanted to kill you yesterday.”*

“That’s what I’m saying! The whole thing was so weird! It was like he was actually grateful or something. The weirdest part was when he offered to train me,” Tommy laughed as the cool wind brushed his cheeks.

Tubbo’s voice suddenly became serious, *“He offered what ?”*

Fuck. Tommy forgot to mention that part.

He laughed nervously. "Oh yeah... Shockwave wanted to teach me how to fight without relying on my powers."

"And you said no, right?"

Tommy hesitated, pursing his lips.

"There is no fucking way, Tommy. The guy almost destroyed your eardrums yesterday!"

"And then he saved me today! I was about to become an ice cube!" Tommy retaliated.

"Just because he saved you one time doesn't mean that you should start taking fighting lessons with the guy!"

Gravel crunched under Tommy's shoes as he landed on the roof of the dorms. "I get it, Tubbo. This is an incredibly stupid idea. But you're the one who said it: I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm not really in the position to be turning away from fighting lessons, especially if the lessons are from the one guy who beat me up."

Now it was Tubbo's turn to hesitate. After a few beats, he finally spoke, *"You are a pretty shit fighter."*

"Fuck you! I am the greatest fighter ever!"

"Says the guy who almost got turned into a fanny pack wearing popsicle tonight."

"I'm coming down and I'm going to smack you with this bag."

—

The next day, Tommy spent most of the day trying to stay awake. Even though he didn't have any more weird dreams, he had woken up with his entire body aching. By the time he made it to the bookstore after school, the painkillers he had taken with his breakfast of two coffees were wearing off.

"You look terrible," Techno stated plainly when Tommy walked through the door.

"At least I don't look like you," Tommy sneered. The two hours of sleep he had gotten were not treating him well. He had a horrible case of bed hair and he forgot to do laundry this past weekend, resulting in him wearing a week-old uniform.

Techno shrugged emotionless. "You wouldn't look very good in pink hair."

"I would look fantastic in pink hair!" Tommy replied.

“Hey, Tommy!” Phil said as walked up with a cart of books. “How was your weekend? I hope you enjoyed your day off.”

Tommy shot Techno another glare before smiling at Phil. “Hi Phil! It was good! I tried to catch up on sleep.”

“It seems like that didn’t really work out,” Techno chimed in.

Tommy twisted back to look at his pink-haired coworker. “Excuse me for being an incredibly awesome and fantastic student who puts his studies before his sleep schedule!” None of these things were true.

Phil softly chuckled. “I’m glad to hear that you attempted to get some rest.”

“What about you, Phil?” Tommy asked, ignoring Techno who rolled his eyes. “Are you feeling better?”

“Oh yeah, I just rolled my ankle so I had Techno take me to the ER.”

Tommy cocked his head to the side. “Didn’t Techno say that you were sick and that you didn’t want to spread it to anyone else?”

Phil quickly stole a glance at Techno, before laughing in response. “Oh! I also had a fever as well! I tripped because I wasn’t feeling very well Saturday night. I was sick and I rolled my ankle. I was both.”

Tommy looked over at Techno who was nodding in agreement. He then smiled sympathetically, “I’m happy that you’re feeling better! From both the sickness and the ankle.”

“Thanks, mate,” The bookstore owner then pushed the cart towards his teenage employee. “Let’s get to it! Techno, help Tommy shelf these in the non-fiction section.”

“As long as I don’t have to work the register anymore,” Techno mumbled before walking down an aisle with Tommy pushing the cart behind him.

Once they reached the end of the aisle, Techno climbed onto a step stool and reached out to Tommy. “Hand me that red book,” he said flatly.

Tommy grabbed the first red book he saw and lifted it at Techno’s open hand, but his coworker didn’t take it. Instead, he said, “The other red book.”

“You should’ve been more specific,” Tommy mumbled as he handed Techno the slightly darker red book that was also on the cart.

“Okay, I’ll keep that in mind for next time. Just hand me whatever now.”

“You don’t need to patronize me. I can hand you the right books,” Tommy frowned in annoyance.

“I’m not patronizing you. It seems like Phil already sorted these so all we have to do is put them on the shelf. All you have to do is hand me the books. I guess you can shelf the books on the bottom of the cart if you’d really like,” Techno replied in an even tone.

Tommy shifted uncomfortably at the misunderstanding. He broke eye contact as he said, “Yeah, I can do that.”

He knelt down on the carpeted floor and started to pick up books from the lower part of the cart. Tommy didn’t really know any of the books he was sorting, let alone understand what information each of them held. He had mainly been working the register for the past two weeks so he was in fairly new territory. He furrowed his eyebrows in confusion as he slowly slid one of the books into the shelf. The book stuck out at an odd angle and Tommy quickly pulled it out again.

Techno towered over him more than usual as the teenager bent over trying to figure out where to place the books. He must have sensed that Tommy was having a bit of trouble because his deep voice came from above, “It’s okay if they stick out weird. That section is for larger books anyways. Just make sure the spine is facing out. If you really can’t figure out where a book goes, just leave it and I can do it.”

Tommy looked up with a smile, “Oh, okay! Thanks!”

The two of them went back to stocking the books in silence. A hum of the fluorescent lights hung in the air along with the occasional shuffling and ruffling of covers and pages of books. Even though Tommy was tired, he enjoyed the plain nature of the task. He was weirdly reenergized as he placed each book into its place. He might even describe the moment as peaceful.

When he worked at the Heroes’ Headquarters, he would barely have time to breathe. He was either writing down reports of Dream’s latest patrols or running around at Dream’s request. Not to mention, Dream hated it when Tommy made mistakes. He always yelled at him or made Tommy start all over even if it could be solved easily. Dream had said he was teaching Tommy how to be responsible, but Tommy felt like he just enjoyed making Tommy feel smaller than him.

Luckily, Tommy didn’t make mistakes *that* often. He was an incredible assistant and Dream didn’t deserve an assistant as great as him. That’s why Tommy quit and did *not* get fired.

Tommy shook his head. He did not want to think about Dream. He was actively trying to get away from his former boss. Dream had no place in his life, even though his afterschool activity kept on refuting that fact.

Speaking of afterschool activity, his gut dropped as he realized that he had a meeting with Shockwave in a few hours. Tommy should be excited to go to a lesson where he was going to actually learn things he wanted to learn, but his clenched jaw told a different story.

He forced his jaw to go slack and released the tension from his shoulders. He hadn’t even realized that he had been straining them. Tommy let out a sigh. This peaceful silence had let his thoughts run a bit too wild. He needed to distract himself.

In other words, he needed to distract someone else.

Tommy craned his neck to look at his coworker and asked, “So Techno, what’s your favorite color?”

“Why do you need to know?” Techno answered without sparing a glance.

“I don’t know your favorite color! That’s why I need to know! Don’t you want to know what my favorite color is?”

“Not really.”

“Fine. Can you at least tell me the worst word you know?”

“I’m not engaging in this conversation.”

“Are you really going to deprive a young learner of the opportunity to expand his vocabulary? Hm?”

“That’s not going to work on me. Wilbur’s the teacher. I don’t really care if you learn anything,” Techno answered.

“Come on, Techno!” Tommy huffed. “I’ve been working with you for weeks and I barely know anything about you! All I know is that you have pink hair and glasses and you don’t like that Greek guy who married his mom.”

“No one likes Oedipus. He’s not a good guy. That’s like the whole point of his story.”

“Technooooo,” Tommy elongated the last syllable of his name. “Come onnnn...”

The pink-haired man groaned as Tommy continued to stretch out the sounds of his words.

“Geez, alright, I’ll tell you something, but please shut up,” Techno surrendered.

“I’m shutting up!” Tommy jumped up on his feet with a smile.

Techno looked down at Tommy and in his classic emotionless voice said, “I like to collect swords.”

Tommy blinked.

“Now you know everything you need to know about me,” Techno returned to filling up the shelves.

“That is so cool!” he exclaimed, words tumbling out his mouth and bouncing in place. “How many do you have? Do you know how to use them? Can you use two at once? What about three? Have you named them all? Can you name one after me?”

Techno squeezed his eyes closed. “If I tell you that I will show you my collection after we’re done, will you please be quiet for the rest of the time?”

Tommy frantically nodded his head, before sitting on the carpet again and sorting through books. It wasn't long before Tommy had completed shelving the bottom of the book cart and began to hand Techno his books again in an effort to have them finish faster.

Sooner than later, Tommy handed the last book on the cart to Techno. He was grinning as his coworker stepped down.

Techno shook his head as he saw Tommy bouncing in excitement. "Alright, follow me."

Tommy trailed behind him as they walked through the maze of the bookshelves. They passed through the inventory room and came up to a staircase.

"Wait, do you live at the bookstore?" Tommy asked, rubbing his arms in the cold environment as they climbed up. Phil once told him that the air conditioning was cranked up back here in order to preserve the books.

"If you're imagining us sleeping between the bookshelves, no." Tommy shook the image of Techno, Phil, and Wilbur in sleeping bags surrounded by books out of his head. Techno continued, "But yeah our apartment is above the store."

"Isn't that kind of annoying? Like you don't have an excuse not to work."

"I don't mind it. I don't have to deal with traffic."

"You know, Techno, I think I learned something else about you," Tommy pointed out.

"What else could you have possibly learned about me in the past 2 minutes?"

"You are very optimistic!" Tommy exclaimed as they reached the top step of the staircase.

"Wow, you read me like a book," Techno deadpanned, his voice dripping in sarcasm. "Oh, wait, you can't read."

"That is simply not true!"

Techno ignored him as he lead him past the banister of the staircase towards a few closed doors. Behind them was a small kitchen that was attached to a small living room with a dark brown couch. They reached the last door in the hallway and Techno paused as he rested his hand on the door handle.

"Please just don't touch anything, okay?" Techno requested. He seemed a bit tired from this whole ordeal already and they hadn't even seen the swords yet.

Tommy held up his right hand and promised, "I won't touch anything!"

His pink-haired coworker let out a sigh before slowly opening the door. At first glance, the room was an ordinary bedroom. A bed with blue sheets sat in the far left of the room with a desk across from it under a window. However, once Tommy stepped into the room, the entire left wall of the room was covered in a dozen swords and knives of various sizes.

Tommy let out a soft gasp, “Woah.”

“Yep. This is the collection,” Techno stated behind him.

Tommy stepped closer to the wide assortment of weapons, his eyes wide trying to take in all of their intricate details. Tommy didn’t know much about swords or knives, but he noticed that Techno had also displayed weapons such as shuriken and sickles. Above his door, Techno even had a decked-out pickaxe.

“When you said you had a sword collection, I feel like you were being a bit conservative,” Tommy remarked.

“Well, a ‘swords, knives, a few shurikens, two sickles, and one pickaxe’ collection doesn’t really roll off the tongue,” Techno shrugged.

“Pff, what are you talking about? That sounds great!” Tommy joked.

“I guess I have no choice but to call it that now,” Techno replied and Tommy could’ve sworn Techno had smiled as he said it.

Techno’s collection had an incredible amount of bladed weapons, but Tommy couldn’t help but notice that one familiar weapon was not there.

“You don’t have any axes. Have you just not found any cool ones yet?” Tommy asked, leaning on a side table next to the bed.

“I don’t really like axes. They’re just a bit too bulky for me,” Techno answered.

Tommy hummed in agreement. Axes sucked because of various reasons. Not because Tommy associated axes with a particular person. Nope.

“So do you know how to use all of these?” he continued his stream of questions.

“Not really. I guess I just admire the fact a lot of effort went into creating these. It’s a bit ironic to let weapons be decorations for a bedroom, but a bladesmith put a lot of work into creating each of these. I feel like it’s a waste to only view them as a way to hurt people. But that’s just my perspective.”

Tommy looked back at the wall of weapons. The way they glinted in the sunlight was beautiful. They could be more than what they were created for. They could be appreciated for things beyond their preconceived destiny.

“I like that perspective,” Tommy replied softly.

He leaned a bit farther back, allowing some of the sunlight to hit his face. Was this what it was like to have healthy employee relationships?

“Hey! Aren’t you two supposed to be working?” Wilbur’s voice suddenly rang through the air, making Tommy lose his balance.

He stuck his hand out to catch himself, but Tommy conveniently forgot about the dozens of bladed instruments that lined the wall he reached out towards. His hand stung in pain as a sharp edge caught his palm and Tommy crashed onto the carpet.

“Are you okay?” Wilbur asked in a panicked tone as Tommy groaned and slowly sat up.

“Yeah, I think I’m alright,” Tommy lifted his left hand to find blood slowly flowing out of his wound and down his arm. “Okay so maybe I’m not completely alright.”

Techno didn’t move as Wilbur grabbed a box of tissues and rushed towards Tommy. “Shit. Sorry for scaring you,” he apologized as he pressed a handful of tissues on the cut.

“You’re fine, it’s not that bad,” Tommy reassured him and then turned towards Techno who was still standing in the same place. He apologized quickly, “Sorry, Techno, about touching your stuff. It was an accident I swear.”

Wilbur answered for him, “No need to apologize Tommy. He knows it was a mistake,” he then twisted around and said, “Techno, I got this. You don’t have to be here.”

The pink-haired man let out a soft hum and swiftly turned away from the other two, leaving the room. Techno seemed more freaked out by the accident than Tommy and Tommy was the one with the open wound that was gushing blood.

“Is he okay?” Tommy asked quietly.

“He’ll be fine. He’s not the biggest fan of blood,” Wilbur admitted.

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. “The guy with the largest sharp weapons collection I’ve ever seen doesn’t like blood?”

“Irony, I know. But that’s the truth. He’s hated the sight of it for as long as I’ve known him.”

“Interesting. I guess I’m learning a lot about Techno today.”

Wilbur helped Tommy to his feet and lead him to the kitchen. It seemed like Techno had gone back downstairs to the store. “That’s probably the most you’re going to learn about him. He’s pretty private. I’ve known him for years and he still won’t tell me his favorite color.”

Tommy slightly winced as Wilbur wrapped his hand in a bandage. “I bet it’s pink,” Tommy guessed.

“It’s not. I already guessed that and he shut down.”

“Really? Then why does he dye his hair pink?”

“That’s what I was thinking! He keeps trying to convince me that he was born with pink hair, but I swear I’ve seen a box of pink hair dye in our bathroom trash bin before.”

“You should just start surprising him in the bathroom and try to catch him in the act,” Tommy proposed.

“I am not going to start barging into the bathroom when it is occupied.”

“Why not? You’re so good at scaring people shitless with your ugly face!” Tommy smirked.

Wilbur pulled the bandages tight and Tommy yelped.

“You do know that I am still your English teacher?”

“You don’t have the balls to fail me.”

Now it was Wilbur’s turn to smirk. “Is that a challenge?”

Tommy frowned. “This is a clear abuse of power! I could get you fired for this!”

“But then who will cover for your ass when you actively destroy school property?”

“I was not trying to break into the vending machine! It fell over on its own!” Tommy might have used his powers a bit to shake the machine. But in his defense, he had paid for that Coke.

Wilbur shook his head with a smile. “And that’s what I told Headmaster Eret. You’re a good kid, Tommy. You’re just also unbelievably clumsy.”

“I’m not clumsy! I’m durable.”

“So like a cockroach?” Wilbur questioned as they began to walk back to the bookstore.

“Pfff, you said cock,” Tommy laughed.

“Maybe I will fail you.”

—

One look at Tommy’s bandaged hand and Phil let him off for the rest of the day. Tommy had insisted that he could still work, but Phil wasn’t taking no for an answer. Wilbur reassured him that he could cover the rest of his shift so Tommy conceded. Techno was nowhere to be found when Tommy finally left the bookstore.

His bed creaked as he fell into it. He kicked his shoes off, enjoying the lack of his two roommates. Tubbo got off of work around the same time he usually did, but Ranboo had the weirdest schedule. There would go days that neither Tubbo nor Tommy would hear from him, and then suddenly they would wake up and Ranboo would be there.

Tommy had insisted it was because Ranboo was a creep just like Dream and Tubbo kicked him in the shin.

Ranboo once explained that he often slept at the Heroes' Headquarters since Dream was working pretty much 24/7, especially on the weekends, but Tommy zoned out by the time Ranboo mentioned what he actually did during that time. Tubbo replied with something about how Tommy had crazy work hours too when he worked for Dream and Tommy jumped back into the conversation and yelled at Tubbo for comparing the two of them. Tubbo then kicked Tommy in the shin again.

The point was that the two of them were nothing alike. Tommy was much cooler and had a way more awesome job than Ranboo.

The door lock clicked and Tommy sat up as the door opened.

"Hey Tubbo, guess what— oh," Tommy stopped himself as his roommate with split-dyed hair walked into the room. He grunted as he flopped back onto his covers.

"Hey, Tommy, sorry that I'm not Tubbo," Ranboo smiled sympathetically. "I think he said he was going to be a bit late tonight. Something about working with Sam in the lab. He seemed pretty excited about it. He was even willing to miss pizza night in the dining hall for it."

"Damn, he must be really invested in this project if he's choosing that over pizza night," Tommy noted.

Ranboo laughed, "Tubbo really likes pizza, doesn't he?"

"Yep," Tommy answered flatly. He was a bit too busy examining the paint on the ceiling to talk to Ranboo.

His other roommate fell silent as he shuffled around the room. Tommy was in the middle of trying to decide if the paint was beige or khaki when Ranboo's voice broke his concentration, "Have you eaten dinner yet?"

Tommy pushed himself onto his elbows. "Are you asking me?"

"Well, you are the only one in the room," Ranboo answered.

"I don't know! Maybe you were asking yourself! Have *you* eaten dinner, Ranboo?"

"No, I haven't. I was just wondering if you wanted to grab it together. It is pizza night," his least favorite roommate pointed out.

Tommy glanced at the clock. He still had a few more hours before he had to meet Shockwave and considering the fact that he had multiple missing assignments in Wilbur's class, it would probably be best if Tommy stayed behind and finished—

GRRRR

Tommy froze as he clutched his stomach. A fucking traitor.

"I guess your stomach made that choice for you," Ranboo said with a smile.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “I guess we can go to the dining hall at the same time, but if anyone asks I am *not* with you.”

Ranboo replied with a soft smile, “Alright, man. Whatever you say.”

When they made it to the dining hall the first thing they were met with was the ambient sound of chattering. Tommy squinted through the crowd of students and frowned as he saw that majority of the tables were taken.

“It seems like everyone else in the building was excited for pizza night too,” Ranboo joked.

Tommy nodded without a word. His stomach was growling more frequently now as the scent of pizza filled the air.

The two of them quickly grabbed their food and began to look for open seats. Tommy looked for single-seat tables where he didn’t have to interact with Ranboo, but not even a second later his roommate was nudging him. Tommy’s gaze followed where Ranboo was pointing to a table where a person with a red beanie was waving enthusiastically at them.

They walked to the table as Ranboo said, “Hey Aimsey! How are you?”

“Hi Ranboo! I’m good! You?” The person— Aimsey replied with a smile. Tommy vaguely recognized them from a few of his classes, but Tommy had never really talked to them. Tommy was more of an independent worker, especially if Tubbo wasn’t in his group.

Ranboo slid into the seat next to Aimsey. “I’m alright, just enjoying a night away from the office,” he then turned to Tommy and said, “Oh yeah! Aimsey, this is my roommate, Tommy! Tommy, this is Aimsey! I think we’re all in the same English class, right?”

Aimsey’s face lit up. “You’re the guy who keeps on mentioning Oedipus! Are you trying to get extra points from Mr. Soot for referencing past lessons? You’re going to have to let me know if it’s working because that class is kicking my ass.”

“Honestly I think every time I talk in that class, I lose points. I think Wil— em, Mr. Soot has something against me,” Tommy answered as he sat down, leaving a chair between him and Ranboo. Using Wilbur’s surname always felt weird on his tongue after starting his job at the bookstore. After spending hours bickering over the placement of price tags and the orientation of posters and so much more, calling him Mr. Soot was like using the wrong name for him. Wilbur just sounded more right.

“That’s not true,” Ranboo countered, “You’re like Mr. Soot’s favorite student! He calls on you like every single class.”

“I don’t know if you’ve ever been in a school, but that’s usually not a sign a teacher likes you. He calls on me even when I don’t have my hand raised!” Tommy replied sharply.

“Maybe he likes hearing your opinion?” Aimsey proposed.

“Or maybe he likes picking on me because he knows it annoys me,” Tommy mumbled before shoving his pizza into his mouth.

“So Aimsey,” Ranboo went on, clearly pivoting the conversation in a different direction, “have you been able to apply to the work-study program yet? I know from experience it’s a super annoying application, not to mention they only placed me in it in the middle of this semester.”

Aimsey shook their head. “I’ve been working on it, but with all the other things I’m doing this year I’m probably not going to get it finished before the end of the semester. Plus exams are coming up and I am not ready at all.”

Tommy almost choked on his mouthful of double-cheese pizza. He had completely forgotten about winter exams. Tommy had been so preoccupied with his secret extracurricular activity that it must have slipped his mind. He probably should start working on that soon. How willing was Wilbur to let Tommy skip his English exam?

“I am in the same boat. With my studies along with my daily tasks for Dream, I barely have time to breathe. But hey, at least Dream gave me free merch,” Ranboo laughed.

Tommy’s head snapped up. He stared at Ranboo in disbelief. “Dream gave you *what*? ”

Ranboo blinked, surprised at Tommy’s entrance into the conversation. “Uh, he gave me a sweatshirt. I told him I was cold the other day and he just gave me one.”

Suddenly Tommy’s face began to heat up.

The *fuck*? Tommy spent weeks in that cold-ass building shivering his ass off. He had mentioned it *one time* , and Dream made fun of him for not being able to fix his own problems. After that Tommy shut up and brought his own sweatshirt.

But getting a sweatshirt from Dream was not even an option in Tommy’s mind. Dream just *gave* Ranboo a sweatshirt? What made Ranboo so special that he got Dream’s kindness? What did he do that Tommy didn’t? Did Tommy not deserve a sweatshirt? Tommy had the same exact job as Ranboo. He was there at his every beck and call. He never asked for a please or thank you. He barely ever saw his best friend and never made any new friends because he was always with Dream. He took every single call, read every email, wrote all of his dumb fucking long reports, and stayed up all night listening to all the ugly details of every single crime Dream stopped. He barely messed up, never complained, and knew everything about his boss. Tommy was the perfect assistant. But then Dream had to go and—

Tommy slammed his hands onto the table and stood up, ignoring the sharp pain that ran through his bandaged hand.

Aimsey and Ranboo stared at him with wide eyes. Ranboo began, “Hey man, are you—”

“I’m not hungry anymore,” Tommy cut him off. He didn’t look back as he grabbed his plate and left the table.

He swung the door open to an empty dorm room. Tommy sighed as he realized that Tubbo was not coming back before he had to leave to meet Shockwave. His anger had died down and cold dumbness washed over him now. The last thing he wanted to was be alone with his thoughts.

He sat down on his bed and pulled out his pink pouch from under the bed. Quickly unzipping the bag he pulled out the healing gel. He has used a bit last night to heal the cut on his face, but there was a good amount left. The perfect amount left for his slashed hand.

Tommy unwrapped his throbbing hand to reveal the wound. The edges were covered in dried coagulated blood, but it was still pretty raw from the middle. Tommy tipped the bottle and drizzled the solution onto the cut. He winced as the wound immediately began to pull itself together. Only a few seconds later a pigmented scar had replaced the cut entirely.

Late afternoon sun rays beamed through the window, covering the room in a golden hue. Tommy threw the bloody bandages into the waste bin as he squinted in the bright rays. His joints cracked as he slowly stood, stretching his arms above his head. His muscles were sore from the past few days of constant fighting, but his mind was buzzing. He pulled on his vigilante gear, strapped on his pack, and jumped out the window.

Tommy wasn't one to just sit around.

Chapter End Notes

I'll be kind and not include a cliffhanger this time :) This chapter was a lot more set-up stuff instead of plot so I hope you enjoyed some character interactions! Lol don't worry the plot will come... I just don't want to get ahead of myself ya know lolol

Thank you for all the lovely comments and awesome art! It really does mean the world to me <3

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #9: Mansplaining is Not Recommended

Chapter Summary

Tommy is a bit tired.

Chapter Notes

tw: fighting and some repeated phrases

please let me know if I need to tag anything else!

(if you see any spelling mistakes or grammar mistakes,,, shhhh don't worry)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy grunted as he skidded across the concrete. His back banged into the empty shipping container and the sound echoed loudly above the gentle waves of the sea next to him.

“So what did you do wrong?” Shockwave asked, crossing his arms.

The blonde teenager slowly rose to his hands and knees, he could already feel a bruise forming on the entire right side of his body.

“You did that on fucking purpose, bitch,” Tommy said under his breath.

“I heard that,” the vigilante’s new ‘teacher’ stated, making Tommy want to curse out the criminal's inhuman hearing ability. Shockwave continued, “Also that was not the correct answer so I’m going to ask you again: what did you do wrong?”

Tommy stood up with a scowl and begrudgingly replied, “I didn’t plant my feet when you blasted me with your stupid powers.”

Ignoring the vigilante’s comments, Shockwave nodded. “You are quick to decrease your gravity to move out the way, but you forget that you can also make yourself an immovable object by increasing your gravity.”

“I don’t need you mansplaining my own powers to me,” Tommy grumbled.

“I am not mansplaining anything!” the criminal snapped back. He then took a breath and more calmly explained, “I am trying to help you be more effective in battles.”

“*Sure*, you want to *help*,” Tommy sarcastically replied as he squeezed his eyes. The throbbing behind his forehead aligned with the aches in his joints that had conveniently come back to remind him how tired he was.

Shockwave had been throwing punches and kicks and vibration blasts at him for the past hour. Even though Tommy had been able to evade most of the criminal's attacks, Tommy had yet to land a single punch. He was beginning to wonder why he had signed up to have some random guy beat him up in the name of ‘learning.’

He tensed his knees to keep them from buckling and raised his fists before continuing, “Whatever, Shockwave. Can we just get on with this?”

The criminal slightly shook his head, “I think we should end it here for tonight.”

Suddenly Tommy’s shoulder’s tensed up. Shockwave wanted to stop. Why would he want to stop? Did he think Tommy was too weak to keep on going? Did he think that Tommy couldn’t handle his training?

“No!” Tommy countered (even though his body would gladly agree with Shockwave). “I can keep on going! I can do this!”

“I’m not blind, Vigilante. You are barely standing,” he said as he gestured at Tommy’s shaking legs.

Fuck. He thought he had stopped them from doing that.

Shockwave continued, “You won’t get better if you can’t keep yourself together. You did a good job for the first—”

“I couldn’t even touch you!” Tommy interrupted, anger seeping into his voice. “That’s not good at all! I am not giving up! I can be better! Just fight me!”

Tommy's cheeks were burning up despite the cold sea wind blowing in his face. His nails dug into his fists as he pleaded. If he was going to help people then he needed to know how to fight. Shockwave was giving him the chance to do that. He clenched his jaw, making his teeth grate between each other. He wouldn’t let Shockwave give up on him. This wasn’t like all the other times when people gave up on him. Tommy was strong. Tommy could prove that he could do this. He could do this. He needed to do this.

He was going to be so good that no one could even think that they could leave him. This was his purpose. He was going to help people by learning how to fight. He was going to be so useful that everyone would regret that they ever brushed over him, especially Dre—

“I’m not fighting you, Vigilante,” Shockwave’s uncharacteristically soft voice broke Tommy away from his thoughts. “At least not right now.”

Tommy opened his mouth to speak, but Shockwave put his hand up and went on, “I’ve been doing this whole fighting thing for a while. So I know all about pushing your body to its limit, but I also know the importance of rest.”

“But I’m not at my limit yet,” Tommy claimed, ignoring the soreness that ached as he released the tension in his shoulders. “I’m still standing! That means we can still fight!”

“You are really fucking stubborn,” Shockwave said as he began to walk toward Tommy.

The vigilante lifted his fists and planted his feet in a fighting stance. He was ready for any attack that was about to come his way. The criminal’s dark coat flapped behind him as he stepped closer and closer to Tommy. Was he going to throw a classic punch at Tommy first? Maybe he was going to do a kick? He surprised Tommy with one of those earlier in the night. What if he suddenly claps and hits Tommy with a vibration blast? Tommy should most definitely then increase his gravity. But what if he swept his foot and hit Tommy’s legs? Then Tommy should jump and decrease his gravity. No, Shockwave told him to—

Red goggles loomed over Tommy as he felt a hand land on his shoulder.

“Wha-” However, Tommy didn’t get to finish as Shockwave gave him a small push. Tommy’s knees immediately gave out and he landed back on the concrete.

“Fuck you,” Tommy growled.

Shockwave towered over him, the moonlight highlighting the edges of his silhouette. “Vigilante, I need to listen to me closely. You don’t need to prove anything to anyone. Least of all some random criminal.”

The red-goggled criminal reached his hand out for Tommy to grab. He yanked Tommy to his wobbly legs. At this point, his whole body was screaming for his bed.

Shockwave’s voice was serious, but not cold. As if actually he cared about the vigilante. “And stop thinking so much about what I want you to do. Think about what *you* want to do. Listen to your body. Listen to your powers. I’m just here to just share my observations.”

Tommy cracked a smile. “Are you admitting to mansplaining?”

Even though Tommy couldn’t see his eyes he could tell that Shockwave rolled his eyes. “I’ll mansplain whatever I need to make you understand that resting is not giving up.”

Tommy’s smile faded as he started to focus on his red sneakers. “But I wasn’t even able to compete with you today. I barely was avoiding your advances.”

A deep laugh made him snap his eyes up. “Do you even remember why I offered to teach you? You are a shit fighter, Vigilante. Yeah, today you proved you can throw a good punch and kick, but you still suck.”

“Now you’re not even mansplaining. You’re just insulting me.”

“You’re also a stubborn little kid with the worst mouth I’ve ever heard.”

“Fuck you and die,” Tommy is always spot on with his comebacks.

“At this point, I’m going to die before a single thing I say gets through that thick skull of yours.”

“My skull is gigantic and holds my huge brain!”

“Don’t you think your singular brain cell gets lonely in all that empty space?” Shockwave asked, annoyingly cocking his head to the side.

“I’ll stab you. I’ll stab you so many times. You’re so lucky I don’t have a knife right now because I would stab you.”

Shockwave stepped back and put his hands up in fake fear, “Oooh, I’m so scared of the Red Hood Vigilante that stops car thieves and helps cats out of trees.”

“My name is not Red Hood Vigilante! That name sucks! Plus, I can help people and stab you at the same time. Those two things are not mutually exclusive.”

“Well, the news would say otherwise, so I think you might be stuck with the sucky name,” the red-goggled criminal dropped his hands and shrugged with a smile. “Sorry Vigilante, I hate to break it to you, but you’re one of the good ones. Stabbing isn’t really your style.”

Tommy frowned, “It’s incredibly rude of you to assume that I don’t stab people. What if I loved stabbing people?”

“Well, then I guess the news should start calling you the Red Hood Stabber.”

Tommy shook his head in disgust. “That’s horrible. Please don’t try to give me any more aliases. You are fucking awful at naming things. You named yourself ‘Shockwave’ for Prime’s sake.”

“What’s wrong with Shockwave? I like it! It fits my powers very well!”

“Yeah as if your powers weren’t just the ability of a glorified washing machine.”

“This is what I get for trying to cheer you up. Now you’re just spouting lame insults,” Shockwave pointed out.

“You started it! Your insults are so much worse than mine!”

Shockwave wasn’t wrong though. Their annoying banter had calmed Tommy down. The hot anger that covered him earlier had faded away.

As he cooled down, a part of him felt confused about why he had even gotten mad.

However, he quickly pushed past the thought as Shockwave softly chuckled at Tommy’s incredible and awesome comebacks. The criminal answered as he turned around, “I think your lack of rest is influencing your comprehension skills. Hopefully, by next week you can come up with better insults.”

Tommy adjusted the waistband to his pink pouch. “I don’t need a week! My insults are the greatest insults ever!”

“You need to go to bed, you little shit.”

“And you need to go to a nursing home, you old fucking mansplainer!”

“I am not a mansplainer! That’s not even a real word!”

“Classic mansplainer, he’s mansplaining the word ‘mansplaining.’”

“I take it back. You are not one of the good ones.”

—

As Tommy approached his dorm room, he noticed there was soft light seeping from the closed shutters. He slipped out of his vigilante gear on the roof before lowering himself down to the window. He did want to take any chances with Ranboo. That guy was getting far too comfortable in Tubbo’s and his room.

He saw movement in the room as peered through the slits of the blinds. Suddenly he felt a slight buzz in his pocket. He pulled out his phone to see a new text from his favorite roommate.

Tubbo: Ranboo is asleep come inside before someone thinks youre trying to break in

Tommy slid open the window and climbed in as he whispered, “that was kind of creepy, you know?”

Tubbo swiveled his chair to face Tommy, the blue light of his computer illuminating the side of his face. “Not as creepy as eyes looking through the blinds,” he replied.

The blonde put his hands up in defense. “Sorry that I was being cautious about Ran *boob*. ”

Tommy frowned at his least favorite roommate’s bed where a pile of blankets softly rose up and down. Tubbo rolled his eyes before continuing, “Speaking of Ran *boo* , he was wondering if you were alright. You kind of left him hanging at the dining hall.”

“I did not leave him hanging,” Tommy huffed as he kicked off his shoes. “His friend was there and I just left after I was done with my food. He’s so extra for no reason.”

“Listen, I’m not trying to interfere with whatever is going on between you guys, but I just wanted to let you know he was concerned,” Tubbo shrugged before turning back to his computer.

“I bet he just wanted to rub it in that Dream like him more,” Tommy said as he fell into his bed. His body immediately relaxed as he hit the barely padded dorm-regulated twin-size mattress. “Not that I care if that green asswipe likes Ranboo more than me.”

“Mhm, sure you don’t,” Tubbo replied without a glance as he slid on his headphones. A news reporter began speaking silently on his monitor.

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. He didn’t enjoy the fact that Tubbo was no longer paying attention to their incredible and thought-provoking conversation.

So he grabbed one of his pillows and chucked it at Tubbo’s head.

“What the hell?!” Tubbo yelled, launching the pillow back at him.

“Stop being boring. Don’t you want to hear about my first lesson,” Tommy lowered his voice to barely a whisper, “with Shockwave?”

“Let me guess, you got beat up?” Tubbo raised his eyebrow.

“There was way more than that!” Tommy refuted.

“Alright, you can tell me all about your adventures of getting beat up by a criminal after I finish listening to this report?”

Tommy craned his neck to look at the monitor just as the image of the news reporter transitioned to L’Manburg’s number one hero. Tommy immediately groaned. “Why would you want to listen to that dick?”

Tubbo quickly looked over his shoulder at the monitor and a smirk spread across his face. He then unplugged his headphones and Dream’s voice began to play out loud.

“Low blow, man!” Tommy stuck his fingers in his ears.

“That’s what you get for throwing stuff at me,” Tubbo answered, his voice muffled.

Tommy stuck his face into a pillow, attempting to get away from the hero’s voice, but he was unsuccessful as the familiar voice seeped past the pillow barrier.

“-of L’Manburg have no need to worry about anything. The heroes of this city are working diligently with the officers of the local police departments to resolve the issue and prevent things like this from happening again ,” Dream said. Tommy could basically recite the rehearsed phrases.

“I know you say not to be worried, but many citizens are worried about the sudden increase in missing people throughout the city. What are some things that regular people can do to assure their safety?” A new voice, presumably the interviewer, asked.

“ The best thing citizens can do to keep themselves and their loved ones safe is always to be aware of their surroundings. However, the best thing we can do is look out for each other. If you see something, say something. Together, we can keep our city safe for all.”

Tommy grimaced. ‘*For all*’ he said like a fucking liar.

“Hey, Ranboo! Wake up!” Tubbo suddenly yelled and Tommy looked up with a confused face.

“Wha-? What’s wrong? What’s happening?!” Ranboo stammered, floundering his blankets as he sat up.

Tubbo excitedly pointed at the screen, “Look! Ender was on the news!”

“Really?” Ranboo pushed the blankets off of himself and stretched his body towards Tubbo’s desk.

Surely enough, the video showed the sidekick with the purple cloak behind Dream. Strands of white hair under his hood bobbed up and down, nodding as the interviewer was thanking the heroes for joining her.

“He didn’t even talk,” Tommy commented, his eyes going back and forth between Tubbo and Ranboo. “He just stood there doing nothing.”

“He’s still on the news. That’s more times than you,” Tubbo answered as he screenshotted the video.

Tommy was about to snap back, but Ranboo spoke first, “He’s right, Tubbo. It’s not that big of a deal.”

“Well, you two can fuck off because I like Ender and I am happy that he is on the news,” Tubbo sharply replied.

“When did you start liking Dream’s useless sidekick?” Tommy said now more confused than ever. Did Tubbo forget about the time when he tried to *throw Tommy in jail*? Twice?!

Tubbo shrugged. “I don’t know. I just like him. He seems cool. Funnily enough, I can like things that you don’t, Tommy.”

Tommy watched as Tubbo and Ranboo shared a glance. A weird feeling washed over him that he hadn’t experienced since moving to Visions. Then it clicked.

He was being left out of something.

“I am sleeping now,” Tommy said flatly.

Tommy then turned away and pulled his covers over his head before his roommates had a chance to reply.

The bruises on his arms and legs ached as he shifted in his bed. It was fine that Tubbo had other friends. Tubbo and him didn’t always have to agree on everything. It was okay that they didn’t always share interests. Like how Tubbo liked engineering and building things and Tommy liked fighting and breaking things. It was alright because they were Tubbo and

Tommy. Tommy and Tubbo. Tommy trusted him with his life. Tommy trusted him with all his secrets.

But did Tubbo trust Tommy with all of his secrets? he thought.

Hushed voices mumbled across the room. He didn't care that Tubbo was friends with the guy that replaced him at his previous job. That was no longer his dream. He wanted nothing to do with that place anymore. And that included Ranboo.

But if Tubbo insisted on being friends with Ranboo, what did that mean for Tommy and Tubbo's friendship?

He rubbed his temples as his head began to pound. The thought of his only friendship disintegrating apparently was the final straw on his fatigued body. His eyes were already closed when he heard the dorm room light click off.

"Good night, big man," Tubbo's voice drifted through his sheets. It was the last thing Tommy heard before his mind granted him the relief of sleep.

—

Tommy was cold again. He tugged the thin blanket around his shoulders a bit tighter as if that would change anything. He resisted the urge to trace the grout lines of the tiled floor he sat on. He'd never admit it, but he was beginning to get a bit bored waiting for — to come back.

Tommy knew better though. — didn't like it when Tommy got distracted. That's when Tommy wouldn't succeed.

"You did not fail, Tommy," — would say, "You simply were not successful. You only fail when you give up. You'll never give up on me, right?"

"I'm not going to give up," Tommy would reply.

And Tommy did not give up. He just usually wasn't successful.

Except for this time.

His success was in the form of the sliver of pulsating light that floated in the air a few feet in front of him. It was as if someone had shaved off a piece of the sun and just left it here for Tommy to admire.

Not that Tommy would want to admire it in the first place. The sliver hummed with such energy that it made his ears pop and it was so bright that Tommy was still blinking away the after shadows it left in his vision. But he didn't mind these things.

He didn't like how cold the sliver was.

"It's incredible," — had said. "You would think with the light that this thing is producing it would be very hot, like the power of the sun hot. But it's the opposite. It's as if it is using the energy around it to power itself."

Tommy had frowned when — looked at the sliver with awe. Something stirred in his gut as he rubbed his hands together trying to get feeling back in them. It was just a stupid line of light. Tommy had done all the work. The dumb light couldn't even create its own energy.

Now the line mocked him as it took away all the warmth in the room. A shiver ran down Tommy's back, making his whole body shake.

Maybe it would help if he thought of warm things. A fire. Maybe after this, he could go see — and he could Tommy his new fire move. A cup of coffee? Tommy believed he definitely deserved at least three shots of espresso at the coffee bar. Plus with the way Tommy could feel his eyes drooping, he needed the caffeine.

Suddenly the crackling of electricity made Tommy snap his head up. He squinted his eyes as he watched flecks of light jump out from the light.

The sliver was growing.

Tommy immediately shuffled back as fast as he could. His legs were still incredibly weak and his arms were screaming under the sudden burst of movement. He whipped his head around, his eyes focused on the door. Where the hell was —?

Before he could yell for help, the room went dead silent. Tommy's blood ran cold. The only thing he could hear was his heart pacing rapidly.

Then as if a hundred voices were stacked on top of each other flooded Tommy's head.

DSVIV RH SVIV? *echoed the voices.*

Tommy squeezed his palms onto his ears, trying to block out the sound, but it was useless.

SVIV RH WRUUVIVMG. MVD. MVD RH TLLW, *the voices continued.*

Tommy pushed his feet against the tile and banged into a table, making the random instruments and papers fall off of it. The metal gadgets clanged as they met the tiles, the sound reverberating through out the quiet room.

GSVIV RH HLNVL MV. HLNVL MV MVD. MVD RH MVVWW.

Tommy's breath hitched in his throat. The fear drenched his body as the realization hit him. The voices were talking about him.

His eyes were wide as he watched a deep red vine slither out of the slit of light. He wanted to run away but his body was paralyzed. He needed to move. Why wouldn't his legs just move?

The crimson dropped to the ground and began snaking towards him.

BLF SZEY YVVM XSLHVM. WL MLG UVZI. GSRH RH ZM SLMLI, *the voices called.*

Finally, a spike of adrenaline coursed through his body and Tommy shot up. He shoved passed the table towards the door, his feet racing across the icy ground. He slammed into the door and wrenched it open.

Relief washed over Tommy as he saw — and the man with the white goggles at the end of the hallway.

“Tommy! What are you doing?” — asked.

He opened his mouth to reply, but he didn’t realize he was gasping for air. Finally, he stammered, “Th- there’s s-some—”

He was cut off by the feeling of ice crawling up his leg. Tommy didn’t have time to scream before he was dragged backward.

—

A shrill beeping attacked Tommy’s ears first. Then it was the light of the sun pouring through the open shutters. Finally, the last phase of the attack was the pillow that smacked him in the face.

Tommy put up no defense as Tubbo stood over him, the fluffy weapon in hand. “Rise and shine, Boss Man. You already missed breakfast.”

The blonde just groaned in response. His throbbing headache was interfering with his ability to form words.

Tubbo thwacked him with the pillow again. “Get up or I’m going to tell Mr. Soot that you’ve been forcing me to do your homework.”

“That’s not even true!” Tommy condemned as he slowly sat up. It was apparent that the sleep had not recovered any of his injuries from last night. Honestly, from the way his eyes stung, it seemed like he hadn’t gotten any sleep at all.

“I know, but you also know that Mr. Soot would probably believe me over you,” Tubbo smirked before throwing a breakfast bar into his lap.

“You’re a piece of shit,” Tommy grumbled as he ripped the bar open and took a big bite.

Tubbo shrugged. “Well, this piece of shit is still waiting to hear about how you go beat up last night.”

The breakfast bar suddenly started to taste like sand. He no longer had any desire to tell Tubbo about he got wiped out at a lesson he signed up for. Plus, Tubbo knowing more about a wanted criminal probably would put him in more danger. He couldn't risk it.

Tommy forced himself to swallow the granola before he croaked, "Don't worry about it, Tubbo. What about you? It seems like you've been pretty busy at the lab?"

His roommate's eyes lit up. "Sam's been introducing me to a bunch of preliminary projects! They are all at like super early stages, but one of these days he said he might he even show me his prototypes for his power neutralizers."

"Oh cool!" Tommy replied, even though the back of his mind nagged him that those power neutralizers would probably be used on criminals and vigilantes alike.

"He has even introduced me to a few heroes that he works with! Like The Shadow and The Cat!"

"Oh, those guys. Dream didn't really work with Cat but Shadow was always pretty nice to me. Even though he always scolded me for cursing," Tommy rolled his eyes as he threw on his uniform. Tubbo already had on their signature white button-down and khaki trouser attire since he had actually woken up on time.

"Oh yeah, The Shadow was really weird about that. But he also brought the entire office muffins the last time he came so I'm not complaining," Tubbo said as he opened the door and Tommy jumped on one foot out as he held a shoe.

"They probably weren't as good as Niki's," Tommy pointed out.

"Oh, dude, a donut from Niki's sounds so good right now."

"When's the last time we even went there? I feel like haven't gone in ages!" Tommy's stomach grumbled at the thought of warm pastries as they walked out of the dorm building towards the main building of Visions.

"Really? I feel like I just went! Oh yeah!" Tubbo snapped as he recalled a memory. "It was last week after work when I ran into Ran-oh, um..."

Tommy's face dropped the awkward air that suddenly clung between the two roommates. Tommy crossed his arms as they continued to walk.

"Do you want to talk about it, Tommy?" Tubbo asked.

Tommy neglected to reply to his name and decided that the pattern of the brick path they were on was far more important. There were just so many bricks here, he wondered that if he took one if anyone would notice. Probably not. The brick was easily replaceable. Everything was replaceable.

"Are you seriously not going to talk to me?" Tubbo probed.

“What do you want to talk about, boss man? You know me, I love talking! In fact, you know every single thing about me! You probably know what I’m thinking right now! There’s no reason for us to talk anymore! Great!” Tommy blurted out.

Then Tommy almost tripped over his feet as Tubbo had stopped in his tracks. Tubbo grimaced as the two of them stood awkwardly in the middle of the path. The final bell of their first class rang as other students quickly swerved around them.

“Tubbo, the bell...” Tommy warned.

“I could care less about the fucking bell, Tommy,” Tubbo’s voice was serious. Almost as serious as the night he had caught Tommy sneaking into their dorm room.

A beat passed between them as the roommates were at standstill.

“Mr. Soot is going to have a great time marking me tardy, I guess,” Tommy said before he let out a humorless laugh.

“I thought we were good, Tommy. I really did. But honestly, I have no idea anymore! Some days you’re completely transparent with me and you tell me every detail of your day and night and then next thing I know you are giving me the cold shoulder!” Tubbo snapped.

“You made it very apparent last night that we don’t always have to share things with each other,” Tommy retorted, his chest heating up with annoyance now.

“Are you serious? Are you mad that I like a superhero?!”

“I don’t care that you like Ender!” Tommy then lowered his voice slightly, “Even though he did try to throw me in jail.”

Tubbo shook his head in disbelief. “So what? You’re upset that I’m friends with Ranboo?”

“No!” Tommy yelled, but at the same moment, his gut twisted into a knot. “I don’t care who you’re friends with!”

“Really? Because you look disgusted every time I speak to Ranboo! Well, I hate to break it to you, Tommy, but he lives with us! And I am friends with him!”

“I don’t give a shit about Ranboo! I give a shit about *you* !”

“Oh, you give a shit about *me* ? Hm? It doesn’t feel like it when you’re constantly blowing me off and putting yourself in danger!”

A pang of guilt cut into Tommy’s chest. “Don’t fucking do that, Tubbo. That has nothing to do with this.”

“Okay! Then tell me, Tommy! What is wrong? Why does Ranboo keep on telling me that you barely eat or that you’re screaming in your sleep?”

“He’s such a fucking snitch,” Tommy mumbled.

Tubbo threw up his arms in disbelief. “You so are fucking dense! He is concerned about you! And so am I!”

He then let out a sigh and softly continued, “Prime, Tommy, please... You still trust me, right?”

Even though the sun was out, the winter wind whipped between the two best friends. Tommy knew that it was a loaded question. Tubbo knew that it was a loaded question. And its answer should have been simple. An easy ‘yes or no’ question. And a few weeks ago, Tommy would have immediately said yes. A few weeks ago he would have never even thought to speak to a criminal, let alone train with one. So many things now were no longer black or white. Yes or no. Good or evil. There was just so much grey. Too much grey.

Tubbo wasn’t grey though. He was bright and colorful and had an incredible future ahead of him. And all Tommy was dulling it with his antics. Tommy wanted to be helpful. But right now he was not being helpful to Tubbo. He couldn’t burden him with his weird dreams or lessons with criminals. Tommy couldn’t do that to him.

“Tubbo, I...” Tommy trailed off.

When he was jumping around criminals, the quips and jokes came so easily. Speaking as Vigilante was a breeze. But as Tommy? It was as if all his words had dried out.

“You know what? I give up. I’m done trying, Tommy. I respect your privacy, okay? When you’re ready to actually tell me things, you know where to find me,” Tubbo’s voice was completely deflated. He then slid off his bag and placed it on the ground before shuffling around in it. “Oh yeah, I also saw this at the store yesterday. I foolishly thought you might like it more than the other one, but I guess it doesn’t fucking matter anymore.”

Then Tubbo shoved something into Tommy’s hands before storming past him. The anger that heated his chest earlier had faded. All he was left with was cold numbness that resembled the wind that whipped through his hair.

He looked down at what his roommate had given him.

It was a red fanny pack.

Chapter End Notes

hi,, so I meant to get this chapter out like a week ago, and then I simply didn't,, writers block is rough rip

lol I feel like I have apologized in every single one of these chapters at this point lololol anyways! Thank you so much for your continued support! It means so much to me! I hope to get the next chapter out faster since I've already started writing it, but please don't trust me lolol

If you enjoyed please do leave a comment! I don't reply to all of them but I do read all of them and they always make my day!

Hope you have a wonderful day/night! <3

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #10: Actively Avoid Liberal Arts Majors

Chapter Summary

Tommy spends the day learning against his will.

Chapter Notes

oh no,,, who let the liberal arts and education major write a literary analysis in a Minecraft roleplay superhero au fanfiction?

it was me. I wanted to rant about literary themes. sorry not sorry.

(if you see any spelling or grammar mistakes don't worry about it <3 just close your eyes <3)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Thank you so much for being able to make it, Tommy,” Wilbur welcomed Tommy as he walked into English class.

Tommy ignored him as 16 pairs of eyes watched him pass through the desks. Tubbo’s eyes were not included in that count and he was focusing on writing something in his notebook. Tommy forced himself to look away from his roommate and slumped down into an open seat in the back of the classroom.

“Well let’s continue with our discussion with the next poem from last night’s reading,” Wilbur said. “So what do we think about Ozymandias, the King of Kings?”

Shit. He had forgotten to do the assigned reading again.

However, it seemed like the rest of the class had followed Tommy’s footsteps as Wilbur’s question was met with silence.

The English teacher sighed. “I would like to remind you all that participation is included in your final grade.”

In response, a few hands slowly came up and Wilbur said, “I am glad to see at least some students care about creating viable classroom discussions. Alright, Ranboo, what did you think of Ozymandias?”

Tommy rolled his eyes as his split-dyed-haired roommate began speaking, “Well, in my opinion, he probably thought very highly of himself. Like he had a giant statue built of himself.”

“Good observation,” Wilbur pointed out before turning. “Aimsey, what do you think?”

Tommy turned to look at the person who wore a red beanie next to Ranboo. They spoke with an enthusiastic tone as if they didn’t wake up with their whole body aching and then watched helplessly as their only friendship fell apart in front of them. He wasn’t jealous.

“Going off of Ranboo, it seems like Ozymandias was incredibly prideful,” Aimsey stated. “He called himself ‘King of Kings’ yet the only thing left of him at the end was a crumbling statue in a desert. He thought he was so great, but in the end, he was nothing compared to the passage of time.”

“Nice point. Ozymandias was an incredibly powerful king who ruled over an immense civilization. I understand why he was so full of himself, he was basically on top of the world at the time. If I was him, I’d also probably have an ego problem. The poem even tells us that Ozymandias is depicted as having a ‘cold command.’ We see that he was a great leader, but also ruthless. However, it didn’t matter that he had this giant civilization. It didn’t matter that he had this incredibly giant statue made of himself. He died. His kingdom no longer exists. That was his destiny and there was nothing he could do about it.”

Wilbur paused, allowing the classroom to fill with the sound of pencils scratching on paper. Tommy sunk lower into his chair. The only destiny Tommy was worried about was getting back to bed.

Wilbur then continued, leaning on his desk as he spoke, “When people analyze this poem they focus on Ozymandias which makes sense the poem is named after him. Something that always sticks out to me is the fact in this 14-line sonnet there are four different characters. Help me out, who are these four characters?”

The same people raised their hands as before. Tommy glanced over at Tubbo who hadn’t offered to answer the question either. Maybe Tubbo had forgotten to read the poem too. No, Tubbo was usually on top of his schoolwork. He’d be the one that would force Tommy into the library to study when he had days off work. Tommy couldn’t even remember the last time the two of them had gone there now. The only thing it seemed like they did together for the past few weeks was vigilante stuff. Had their friendship just boiled down to breaking the law together—

“Tommy?” Wilbur’s voice cut through his thoughts.

A blank expression covered Tommy’s face.

Wilbur smiled and repeated the question, “Who’s the fourth person in the poem? We have mentioned Ozymandias, the traveler, and the sculptor of the statue. I’ll give you a hint. Look at the first word of the poem.”

Tommy looked down sheepishly at his desk, “I don’t have the poem.”

Wilbur probably was loving the fact that Tommy was acting like an unprepared idiot. Not saying that he *wasn't* an unprepared idiot at the moment. He was currently very unprepared and was very much an idiot.

“That’s alright. Could someone please share with Tommy for a second?” Wilbur asked the class.

However, the question was met with silence. Tommy glanced around waiting for someone to help him out, but all his peers kept their heads forward. Not a single person even looked in his direction. Not even Tubbo moved. Tommy felt his face heat up.

“Here, you can use mine,” an annoyingly familiar voice said a few seats away from him. He turned to see Ranboo holding out a piece of paper.

“Thanks,” Tommy said softly as he took the paper. Ranboo gave him a soft smile before looking forward again.

“Thank you, Ranboo,” Wilbur noted, before focusing on Tommy again. “Alright, Tommy, please share with your peers who apparently *hate* sharing their poems, except Ranboo. Who is the last character in this poem?”

Tommy smiled at Wilbur’s dig at his classmates before quickly finding the first word of the poem. Maybe Wilbur wasn’t such a bad teacher.

“The poem started with ‘I’ so I guess the last character is the person talking in the poem,” Tommy said, looking up from the paper.

“You’re right, Tommy! The final character is the speaker of the poem! So to just recap, we have four people mentioned in the poem: the speaker, the traveler, the sculptor, and Ozymandias. However, of these four people, only two of them are actually present in the poem. Now you may be wondering: ‘the poem is named Ozymandias, who cares about the other people?’ So let me ask you a question in response: Who is telling Ozymandias’s story?”

Wilbur then held his hands up in defense, “No need to panic, I’m not asking you guys to answer that. When we speak about this piece it usually ends up being a discussion about two major themes: fate and legacy. Ozymandias was a man whose legacy was fated to be a half-sunken shattered visage in a boundless desert. He couldn’t run away from his destiny, but he attempted to leave something great and failed. However, that begs the question: was it ever his to control in the first place?

“Was he ever in control of his legacy? I have to say Ozymandias seemed like he tried when he wrote down ‘*My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings; Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!*’ but we all also know how *that* looked in the end. After that, he ordered a sculptor to create a statue of him. A sculptor who had his own thoughts and ideas about Ozymandias that influenced the king’s story. Do you see where I’m going with this?

“Right from the start, we are far away from any idea that Ozymandias could have ever told us about his own legacy. The speaker is telling us, the audience, what this random traveler, who

the speaker does not know, has told him. The entire poem is basically all dialogue! It's a story that's being told.

"So why did I just go on a long tangent about this poem that was published in the 19th century? And I know I have said it before, but I'm not here to tell you what a piece of literature means. You can choose to understand a random poem from your high school English class however you want to. But I want you to remember that literature and writing and art are just mediums of human expression. I believe that Shelley was sharing his thoughts about the human desire for legacy and he used Ozymandias as an example.

"Humans are so funny in that aspect. We are tiny specks on a floating rock in the middle of space, yet we are obsessed with leaving something for the other specks to remember us by. No one wants to be forgotten. No one wants to be replaced by something bigger and better. So we try and try our best to leave something that will allow us to be remembered. Yet, as Shelley tells us about Ozymandias, that just isn't the case.

"I don't know if our destiny is set in stone. Anything can happen. But let me ask you: who is going to tell your story? Because it's probably not going to be you."

A bell rang out and everyone immediately began to stuff their bags.

"And that is the school's way of telling me to end my monologue. Remember to please turn in your reflection on the poems we discussed by the end of the day tomorrow!" Wilbur called out as students shuffled out of the room.

Tommy attempted to camouflage himself in the crowd, but a hand on his shoulder stopped him before he could escape.

"Tommy, wait," Wilbur called.

"I am going to be late for my next class," Tommy mumbled, avoiding eye contact.

"I know for a fact that you do not care about punctuality," Wilbur said as he closed the door behind the last student (other than him).

"Wilbur, I am not in the mood," the blonde teenager frowned as he crossed his arms.

"Oh, don't worry, I can tell that you are in a horrible mood," the English teacher then pointed at a desk. "Sit down."

Tommy groaned as he followed the directions. Wilbur sat at the desk next to him, adjusting it to face him.

"You look like shit," Wilbur said flatly.

"Are you allowed to curse at your students? Like legally?" Tommy questioned.

He shrugged. "Probably not, but seriously, did you get any sleep last night?"

"Yes! Why is everyone so concerned about my sleeping habits?!" Tommy snapped back.

An awkward silence settled between them. Tommy's gut twisted.

"I'm sorry," Tommy said, his voice much softer now.

"Yeah, no. Don't do that. It's weird," Wilbur replied.

"I am trying to apologize to you for being impolite!"

"When in the world have you cared about being impolite with me, Tommy?"

"Maybe I just started!"

Wilbur let out a long sigh as he shook his head. "I appreciate the effort, but we both know that this isn't you. However, as much as I would like you to talk about whatever is going on, I can't make you. But I do have to check in on you."

"Why? I'm doing fine! I even turned in my homework yesterday!" Tommy exclaimed.

"Someone reported that you weren't doing well and the administration asked me to check in on you."

"Who reported me?" Who the hell thought they knew Tommy so well that—

"Ranboo. He was concerned after seeing you in distress multiple days in a row."

Tommy banged his hands on the desk. "That MOTHERFUCKER KNOWS NOTH—"

He was swiftly cut off by Wilbur putting up his hand.

"Alright, I get it. There was a misunderstanding. I guess Ranboo just misinterpreted some things."

Tommy slumped back into his chair with a frown. "I swear that he is trying to fuck up my life."

"How so?" Wilbur asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Where would I even start? He constantly tries to get me to talk about myself like he wants me to reveal my secrets or something. He just assumes that we're similar because I used to have the same job as him! And then he rubs it in my face that he's better at being Dream's assistant than me, even though I was the greatest assistant there ever was! And now he's getting all buddy-buddy with Tubbo! They even have a bunch of inside jokes now! Next thing I know he's going to start going to the bookstore!"

A beat passed as Tommy caught his breath after his rant. He felt a slight relief speaking about the thoughts that had been plaguing him the moment he met his tallest roommate.

However, that relief was short-lived once Wilbur opened his dumb teacher mouth.

"Have you considered that maybe he's just trying to be your friend?"

Tommy immediately stood up and put on his backpack. "I'm leaving."

"Okay, okay! I'm sorry for insinuating that Ranboo might be trying to be friends with you," Wilbur apologized.

"I don't accept your apology because I don't know what that word means," Tommy replied, crossing his arms.

Wilbur sighed, "Insinuating is another word for suggesting."

"Still not accepting your apology."

"I am not trying to invalidate your feelings towards Ranboo and his actions. I'm just trying to give you an outside perspective on the situation. From what you've told me and from what I've seen in class, Ranboo's actions don't seem malicious."

"If you keep using fancy English teacher words, I will never come back to this class."

Wilbur shook his head in disappointment. "Malicious is another word for hostile. I was hoping your job at the bookstore would have increased your vocabulary."

"Well, maybe you should stop *insinuating* things," Tommy replied as he narrowed his eyes.

The sweater-vest-wearing teacher smiled before continuing, "I'm just trying to say that this situation may not have to do that much with Ranboo. Your sleeping and eating habits are worse than the regular horrible teenage standards and it seems like your body is failing under them."

As much as Tommy wanted to protest, Wilbur wasn't entirely wrong. His dislike of Ranboo was nothing compared to the soreness that plagued his entire body. His afterschool activity had been becoming more and more taxing with the random run-ins with both criminals and heroes. His joints ached at the thought of jumping from one rooftop to another.

He clenched his jaw instead of replying and focused on the tiled floor. He found himself tracing the grout lines with his eyes.

The desk creaked as Wilbur stood up and put his hands on his hips. "I guess I have no choice. I'm sending you back to your room."

"I have other classes to go to, Wilbur," Tommy argued.

His words had no effect as his incredibly annoying English teacher walked over to his desk and picked up the landline. "You are not learning anything in this state. I am calling in that you're sick."

"But—"

Wilbur ignored him as his voice became more formal, "Hello, this is Wilbur Soot. I just wanted to call in that Tommy Innit will not be attending the rest of his classes due to illness. I will have him drop into the nurse's office before heading back to his dorm. Thank you. Bye."

“What the hell? Are you serious?” He slightly adjusted his bag, the pressure now was making his shoulders ache. At this point, there were parts of Tommy’s body that were hurting that he didn’t know could even hurt.

Wilbur stepped out from his desk and walked up to Tommy. Tommy frowned harder as Wilbur ruffled his hair. He quickly slapped his hand away from his head as Wilbur answered, “I can tell you’re sick because normally you would never be upset about the fact you get to miss school.”

“That is not true! I adore education!”

“Your mind is completely fried. Go to the nurse’s office before going back to bed. And then get some rest,” Wilbur said before giving him a slight push towards the door.

“Oh yeah? What happens if I don’t?” At this point, words were just coming out of his mouth without thought. Not that he thought about what he said in the first place.

A smirk crawled across the lame sweater-vested English teacher. “I guess I’ll just have to fail you.”

“Abuse of power!”

—

Tommy squinted in the sunlight after Wilbur finally kicked him out of his classroom. He stood outside the main building on an empty sidewalk, the sounds of the city in the distance.

He had ignored Wilbur’s request to go to the nurse. He didn’t need to be asked various questions about why his entire body was bruised and where he had gotten dozens of scrapes and cuts from. Not to mention his head was fogged up from the lack of sleep that he wouldn’t even be able to give a believable lie in response. Wilbur’s other request of getting rest was much more appealing to him.

However, Tommy was a creature of spite.

So instead of taking himself to his soft bed, Tommy and his aching limbs found their way in front of the door of the bookstore.

He nervously cracked his knuckles, staring at the wooden door. He was already exhausted thinking about explaining to Phil and Techno why he wasn’t at school. Overall he was tired of explaining himself to everyone. So what if all his joints were causing him pain every time he moved? Or that he wasn’t sleeping because of weird nightmares? And yeah maybe he forgot a few meals between classes and work and vigilantism, but that was nothing compared to when he worked for Dream. But he was free now! He didn’t have to answer to anyone anymore!

So why does it feel like I have to answer even more questions now? He thought as he rubbed the scar on his hand.

But he wasn't supposed to have a scar on his hand. He was supposed to have a cut from one of Techno's swords that he got yesterday. He was not supposed to have magical healing gel from criminals because he was not supposed to be a vigilante that was on the run from the heroes of the city. In theory, he wasn't even supposed to have powers since he had never revealed his powers to anyone besides Tubbo.

Yet here he was with a healed hand and no explanation for his new boss and pink-haired co-worker. *Fu-*

"Um, are you going to come inside?" a deep voice spoke, making Tommy jump. He looked up to find Techno standing in the open doorway.

Tommy shoved his hand into his pocket. "Techno! Funny seeing you here!"

"We both work here. I literally saw you yesterday."

Tommy let out a loud laugh. "You got me there! Classic Techno! Always calling me out on my silly jokes! Our banter is hilarious!"

Techno furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. "Okay. I still don't get why you're standing outside of the store."

"I was just appreciating the beautiful weather we're having!" Tommy exclaimed as he looked up at the cloudy sky. It seemed like the sun had hidden away in embarrassment after seeing the direction this conversation was going.

"Alright. Well, when you're done appreciating the weather please come inside because you're blocking the entrance," Techno replied flatly before turning around.

"Oh, I'm not coming inside," Tommy stated as he took a step backward.

Techno looked behind with his eyebrow raised. "So you came all the way here to stand in front of the bookstore door to enjoy the weather?"

"Mhm," Tommy hummed in agreement as he nodded his head. "That's exactly what I did. I just really enjoy the color of the door. It's very calming to me. But now I'm all done looking at the door so I'll just be off!"

The blonde started to turn away from his coworker, but Techno spoke before he got very far. "Is this about yesterday?"

Tommy laughed nervously. "What happened yesterday?"

Techno pointed at his hand as he replied, "The sword incident? I was expecting you to come back and make fun of me."

In Tommy's defense, a lot of things had happened in the past day and the healed cut was not really on his radar. His pounding headache that had started at the beginning of this conversation was a bit more apparent to him.

"On any other day, I would have roasted a guy like you for being scared of blood, but after my time with the door, I have decided to spare you," Tommy said as he took another step back.

"Wow, you are so kind," Techno said without an ounce of appreciation.

"I am so glad that you noticed," Tommy was now a few feet away from him.

"I was talking to the door."

Tommy glared at him before turning around. "Whatever. I'll see ya, Tech—"

However, the rapid change in direction was not something his weak knees could handle. With his hands stuck in his pockets and his thoughts too slow to apply his powers, Tommy had no choice but to watch himself hit the concrete, face first.

But the expected pain never came. Instead, he stopped midair; his nose barely touching the sidewalk. He slightly turned his head to find Techno clutching the back of his shirt, holding him up.

"Wilbur was right. You are clumsy," Techno noted as he pulled Tommy up to his feet.

"I am not clumsy! I am durable!" Tommy protested, but just as he finished his knees failed him again.

Techno caught his arm before he completely collapsed. "You can say that, but your body disagrees with you."

The teenager grimaced at the fact that his coworker wasn't completely wrong. He was still blinking away the darkness that covered the edges of his vision and he couldn't deny the fact that he was extremely lightheaded.

"I'm not agreeing with you, but I think I should sit down," Tommy replied through clenched teeth.

"Are you able to make it back to the store?"

"Yeah, I think—" Tommy started to move forward, but black dots flashed in front of him as a wave of nausea washed over him.

"Actually, I don't think so," he admitted, reaching toward the wall to stabilize him.

Techno helped him sit down on the sidewalk. Tommy closed his eyes and leaned his head back, his hair slightly catching on the brick wall. He heard muffled noises, but he couldn't tell if Techno was trying to speak to him or if it was just the noises of the city. He didn't really care as he focused on staying conscious.

Suddenly, a cold hand touched his forehead. Tommy snapped his eyes open to find Techno kneeling in front of him.

“You’re a bit warm, but it doesn’t seem like you have a fever,” the pink-haired man said as he removed his hand from Tommy’s head. “Did you eat breakfast?”

“I had a breakfast bar,” Tommy answered honestly. He didn’t have enough energy to be a smartass at the moment.

Techno shook his head. “And what did you have for dinner last night?”

“I can’t even recall what happened like ten minutes ago. How do you expect me to remember what I had for dinner last night?” Maybe he did have a bit of energy to be a smartass.

“Alright, whatever you had, it clearly was not enough,” He said as pushed himself up and then held out his hands. “You good now?”

Tommy nodded and took one with his free hand and shakily stood to his feet. “Thanks,” Tommy mumbled.

“You know I’m not going to freak out if I see your hand when it’s wrapped up? You don’t have to keep hiding it,” Techno pointed out, glancing at Tommy’s hand that was still stuffed in his pocket.

“It’s not, though.”

“It’s not what?”

“It’s not wrapped up,” Tommy wasn’t technically lying.

“Oh.”

A few beats passed as Tommy strained his tired mind trying to think of a way to get out of this conversation. This whole situation was a mess. It was clear Techno was still uncomfortable with the fact that Tommy bled all over his bedroom floor and now he had almost passed out in front of him. Tommy had become a burden and it was far too much work to deal with him anymore. Techno already had no desire to get to know Tommy and at this point, any progress Tommy made in their relationship had gone down the drain. It seemed like that was going to be a pattern today, wasn’t it?

He opened his mouth to say goodbye but was surprised to hear his coworker's voice instead.

“Do you need more bandages or something? We have some more at the store,” Techno offered, pointing behind him. “I forgot that you were a teenager living in a dorm with like nothing.”

Tommy blinked a few times before nodding. Tommy was feeling much better as they walked back to the bookstore. His headache was still throbbing, but he no longer felt like he was going to empty his stomach (not that there was much in there).

“Do you need help?” Techno asked after grabbing a few cotton balls and bandages from behind the counter and handing them to him.

“No!” Tommy blurted out a bit too fast. “Ehm- you probably would faint from how gross it still is,” Tommy lied.

“Says the guy who almost fainted literally five minutes ago.”

As an epic comeback, Tommy stuck his tongue out before heading to the bathroom.

The door clicked behind him as he set down the medical supplies. He pulled out his healed hand from his pocket and let out a sigh of relief. In a weird turn of events, he was incredibly grateful that Techno had no desire to get to know him. When he worked for Dream it felt like he was constantly trying to prove himself and explain why he deserved there. And even though Tommy spent almost every hour of the day with Dream for six months, when he was fired quit it felt like Dream still didn’t know a single thing about him.

He haphazardly placed multiple bandages on his palm. He had only worked for a little over a month at the bookstore but he felt more comfortable here than he had ever felt at the Heroes’ Headquarters. The 100-plus floored office building was somehow incredibly busy and filled with people, but also cold and lifeless. The bookstore was usually pretty empty besides a few customers throughout the day, but there was more life in a singular bookshelf here than in the entire building of his old workplace. There was nothing left for him over there.

After he had firmly secured the wrapping around his hand he made his way back to the front of the bookstore to find Techno silently reading. On the counter in front of him was a sandwich and a bottle of water. Tommy glanced at the clock wondering why Techno was planning to have lunch so early.

After a few seconds, he cleared his throat to get his coworker's attention. Techno pushed up his glasses as he looked up from his book.

“Thanks for the supplies,” Tommy said, “but I probably should be heading back now.”

“You should probably eat something before you leave,” the pink-haired man pushed the sandwich towards him. “Wilbur will be mad if I let you pass out.”

Tommy’s stomach grumbled at the sight of a proper meal. He thanked Techno as he grabbed the sandwich and sat down on a box of unopened books across from the counter.

He took a large bite of the sandwich before asking, “Why do you care what Wilbur thinks?”

Techno had gone back to reading and answered without even glancing up from the pages. “I don’t. But his lectures are long and I don’t want a lecture so here we are.”

Tommy nodded in understanding as he too was a victim of Wilbur’s lectures. He quickly inhaled the sandwich and the water. His mind immediately became more clear and his headache faded away. His joints still ached but at least now he didn’t feel like his body was imploding on itself.

A few minutes passed with stillness in the air with the only thing interrupting the silence was the sound of flipping of paper. Now that he was done with his food, Tommy knew it was probably best to leave. He should go back and get rest in his own bed. However, his bed was also in the same room as Tubbo who was currently mad at him. Maybe he could go to the library to finally catch up on his homework and study for winter exams? But the library was also the same place where Tubbo used to help him with his horrible writing skills. Not that Tubbo was ever going to help him again after his behavior lately. Tubbo was probably partnering up with Ranboo in class right now. Tubbo was already replacing—

Unable to stand the quiet any longer, Tommy finally spoke up, “So what are you reading?”

“A book,” Techno replied flatly.

The blonde rolled his eyes. “What is it about?”

“It’s just a collection of Greek myths.”

“Which myth are you reading about right now? Is it the one about the guy who married his mom? I hate that guy. He’s annoying.”

“How about you pick up a book about Greek myths and find out yourself? Oh wait, you can’t—”

“I can read!”

“You work at a bookstore and I have yet to see you open a book.”

“I have read so many books you wouldn’t even know! I am a book reading legend! I am the absolute most pog at reading books!”

“Alright. If you’re *so* good at reading, go read a book.”

Tommy crossed his arms in protest. “But now I am only interested in reading your book.”

“We are in a store with hundreds of books and the only book you want to read is the one I am currently reading?” Techno looked over his glasses in disbelief.

“Yes.”

“You are unbelievable,” he stated before directing his attention back to the pages.

“Technooo,” Tommy whined. “Just please tell me if you’re reading about the guy who had sex with his mom.”

“I am not reading about Oedipus.”

“So who are you reading about?”

“You just asked if I was reading about Oedipus. I am not required to answer any more questions.”

“If you just tell me, I will stop asking questions!” This was a lie.

Techno glanced up, emotionless. Tommy looked back at him with a charming and handsome smile. After a moment the pink-haired coworker sighed. “Fine, I’m reading about a guy named Theseus.”

Tommy shifted on the box to get more comfortable. “Did he also have sex with his mom?”

“No. But was prideful just like Oedipus. He actually became so obsessed with the achievements of being the hero that he ended up getting exiled by the people he had once protected.”

“What did he even do that was so bad to get him exiled?”

“Eh, you know just kidnapped some women and then started a war that destroyed the city, nothing too big.”

“Oh yeah, just classic typical hero stuff. Super overrated that he got exiled for little stuff,” A soft smile ended up on the teenager’s face.

“The funny thing is some people talk more about his ship than Thesus himself.”

Tommy let out a big yawn before asking, “What was so amazing about his ship?”

“The ship itself wasn’t anything special. It’s the paradox surrounding the ship that gets attention. After Thesus finished slaying the minotaur, the citizens of Athens decided to celebrate this event every year by taking the ship to the island of Delos to honor the god, Apollo. Obviously, after years and years of this ritual, the ship would need maintenance. This is where the paradox comes in. If the Athenians replaced each plank of the ship with a new piece of wood each time one began to rot, then eventually all the planks would be replaced and none of the planks would be from the original ship. So do the Athenians still have the same ship as Thesus? And if not, at what point did it become another ship?”

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. “Well... if all the planks are the same then it should be the same ship, but I guess all the planks are new so it could technically be a new ship too? This is hard. My brain hurts.”

“Well, it is a thought experiment so it’s not really supposed to be easy to think about.”

“So what’s the answer? Is it the same ship or not?”

Techno shrugged. “There’s not one correct answer. It depends on how you view it. Some philosophers see it as a metaphor for humans and identity. They argue that identity is fluid and nothing can retain its identity for very long because everything is always moving and nothing stays still. Therefore, neither ship is the original ship of Theseus.”

Tommy laid his head back onto the bookshelf behind him. “Now my brain really hurts. How can they both be the ship but also neither of them is the ship?”

“Who knows, I’m just telling you about what I’ve read.”

“What do you think though?”

Techno raised his head from his book, his face unreadable. “I think the ships can be both the be the ship and not be the ship. They are the same because they share the identity of being Thesus’s ships. But, as time goes on, change is inevitable. There will always be the original title of the ship and the memories that came with it, but as each year passed the Athenians gave the ship new memories. They changed the identity of the ship as they created new experiences with the ship. It’s the same ship but also more. But that’s my opinion. In reality, it is just a big old boat. Who really cares?”

Tommy stared at the ceiling as his coworker went back to reading. Thesus’s story reminded him of his English class from earlier. Even though Tommy had been barely listening to his English teacher’s monologue, apparently something had seeped through. Even fictional characters with long myths written about them couldn’t stop people from completely ignoring them and only talking about water transportation.

Ozymandias. Theseus. The guy that had sex with his mom. They probably thought they were doing the right thing at one point. They all had times when they thought they were the hero of their stories. And look where it got them.

Maybe ever since he got fired quit being Dream’s assistant, he had been replacing all the planks of his former self. Maybe losing his trust in Tubbo had been the final plank.

If a person switches their identity to be someone else are they still the same person?

Chapter End Notes

This one was a bit of fluff before the storm,,, :)

Thank you so much for all the love on this fic I really appreciate it seriously <3 I read every single comment and it truly means the world to me!! See you in the next chapter!

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #11: Try Your Best (Results May Vary)

Chapter Summary

Tommy tries his best.

Chapter Notes

fair warning: it's all dialogue again rip

TW // fighting, graphic description of wound, blood

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up to hushed voices murmuring beside him. He rubbed his eyes as his stiff limbs attempted to move into a more comfortable position. He didn't even realize he had fallen asleep. Wilbur and Techno appeared in his vision as he blinked the drowsiness out of his eyes. He shifted on the box of books and his coworkers immediately turned their attention toward him.

"Good evening, Tommy," Wilbur said as he crossed his arms. "How was your nap?"

Tommy stretched his arms above his head before standing up. "It was *fantastic*. Thank you for asking."

"I know you enjoy disobeying me, but seriously? I give you the day off and you come to work? Why?"

"In his defense, he didn't do any work," Techno commented from behind the counter.

"Exactly! Plus, Wilbur, you should know that every time you give a suggestion, it is no longer an option," Tommy said as he gave his legs a shake, trying to get feeling back into them.

"For the love of Prime," Wilbur shook his head. "Alright, this is not a suggestion; it is an order from your boss and teacher. You need to go back to your dorm and go to bed and get some real sleep."

"When did you become my boss?!"

"Since always! I own this store with Phil!"

“Sounds fake. I only answer to Phil,” Tommy turned away.

“In that case, you need to listen to Wilbur,” Phil chimed in, walking with a plastic bag.

“What? That is not fair, Phil! I have to listen to Wilbur all day at school!” Tommy protested as he glared at Wilbur who had an annoying smirk on his dumb face.

“Mate, I have no choice but to agree with Wilbur about this. You almost passed out today,” Phil handed Tommy the plastic bag. It was filled with a few boxes of various foods. “I know dorm food can get boring pretty fast so I was thinking that a few homemade meals might help you remember to eat on a regular basis.”

“Oh, Phil, I can’t—”

“Do not even attempt to protest. You have to take them. That is an order from your boss,” Phil interrupted with a smile.

“Thank you,” the teenager softly replied.

“It’s not a problem. If you ever need anything, please don’t hesitate to ask. Balancing school and work can be difficult. You should have seen Wilbur and Techno when they were in school, damn, they were complete messes.”

“Please don’t lump me in with the insomniac,” Techno pointed out.

“That’s big talk from the guy who can’t be bothered to even put his book down during meals,” Wilbur pushed back.

“You have a caffeine addiction,” Techno flatly stated, his eye fixed on his book.

“You collect weapons and then hang them on walls!”

“I don’t know, being addicted to caffeine is kind of cringe,” Tommy commented.

Wilbur turned toward the blonde with a frown. “You have no place in this conversation. You just took a 6-hour nap on a box of books.”

“Wil, you once slept for 12 hours after being awake for 48 hours straight,” Phil commented.

“Seriously, Phil?” The English teacher rubbed his temples in annoyance. “I hate all three of you.”

“I thought that was already established,” Tommy smirked as he sat back down on the box of books.

“I will fail you,” Wilbur frowned.

“I don’t care! You are old and balding and have no bitches,” Tommy shot back.

“At least *I* can read!”

Tommy jumped up angrily. “I can read! I literally read something in *your* class today!”

Phil placed his hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “I bet you can read very well, mate,” he said before turning to his son, “Stop arguing with Tommy about his reading comprehension skills. You are his English teacher.”

“Honestly his lack of reading skills is a reflection of your teaching ability,” Techno chimed in.

Wilbur threw his hands up in defeat. “I give up. I cannot win against favoritism.”

“Wait, Phil, am I your favorite?” Tommy asked excitedly.

“And this is where the conversation ends! You need to get back to your dorm. It’s getting late,” Phil replied, clearly avoiding the question.

Tommy glanced outside to see the street lights flickering on and golden haze filling the sky. He needed to do many things, but getting back to his dorm room was the last thing on that list.

The teenager began to examine the speckled carpet of the bookstore. He wasn’t that big of a fan of carpeted flooring, but this one fit the bookstore. Hardwood floors were his favorite type of flooring. He hated tiled floors. They just felt too sterile as if someone just knew that he was going to make a mistake and that he would need to clean it up. Tiled floors were for untrustworthy people who never learned from their mistakes. Tiled floors were for people who needed to be bleached clean from their act—

“Would you like that, Tommy?” Phil asked. The blonde quickly looked up to his boss who was furrowing his eyebrows.

“I like your carpet,” he replied.

“Thank you,” Phil said with a sympathetic look. He glanced a look at his son who was standing with his arms crossed. “However, I asked if you wanted one of us to walk you back to your dorm?”

“No!” Tommy blurted out, registering the question. He cleared his throat and more calmly answered, “No, I can get back to my dorm by myself.”

Maybe Tommy could stash the food from Phil somewhere and go for a quick patrol. He didn’t have his regular gear, but that wasn’t a problem he could easily figure out something.

“Are you sure? Last time you said you were going back to your room you ended up here,” Wilbur pressed. His ugly and lame face was starting to agitate Tommy.

“You don’t need to monitor my every move. I’m not a fucking child. Believe it or not, I can take care of myself,” he snapped back.

“You almost passed out from dehydration and exhaustion.”

“So? Why the fuck do you care?! You’re supposed to be my English teacher! You know nothing about me!” Tommy burst, his voice getting louder with each word.

However, Wilbur wasn’t letting up either. “I know more than enough to see that you are destroying yourself! Why are you being so stubborn?”

“Why can’t you just leave me alone?”

“You want me to leave you alone? Really? Just like how *Tubbo* is leaving you alone?”

Tommy’s voice caught in his throat. A wave of shame made his face hot. He gritted his teeth as he felt his eyes sting. Wilbur’s face dropped as he realized what he had said.

Tommy’s voice was low as he broke eye contact with his English teacher. “Fuck *you* .”

Wilbur tried to move forward, but Phil stuck his arm out. He opened his mouth to speak, but Tommy pushed past his boss before he could let out a word.

The bells jiggled as he stormed out of the bookstore. The night air immediately cooled his cheeks as a shiver ran through his body. There was no need for a jacket as the heat from the argument was more than enough. The anger was still running through his veins as he made his way down the sidewalk.

It was a low blow to bring up Tubbo. Wilbur was just saying things to hold over his head. He wanted to make Tommy feel bad for messing up. Dream was always getting on his case about messing up too. It was like he hadn’t changed at all since leaving his old job. He was still making mistakes and leaving others to deal with the messes. Why couldn’t Tommy just get it together? What was wrong with To—

“-mmy! Wait!” A voice yelled behind him. The blonde turned around to see his sweater-vest-wearing teacher running in the distance.

“For Prime’s sake,” Tommy groaned as he rolled his eyes.

Wilbur caught up to him, his arm stretched out with the bag of food. “You forgot this.”

“I don’t-”

“Phil will never forgive either of us if I come back to the shop with this, so please, just take it.”

“Fine,” Tommy reluctantly took the food and quickly turned around.

“Also…” Wilbur’s voice was soft. “I wanted to say sorry. It was a low blow to bring up Tubbo.”

“Yeah, it was,” Tommy agreed, his back still facing his teacher/coworker.

“I just want the best for you. We all do. And I can bet that includes Tubbo.”

“I never asked you guys to care. I’m perfectly fine doing things on my own,” he crossed his arms

“Hate to break it to you, but you don’t get to decide who cares about you.” Wilbur pointed out. “However, I’m never going to force you to talk to me. I get why you wouldn’t want to anyways. I am apparently ‘old’ and ‘get no bitches.’”

The teenager turned with a slight smile. “You are also lame and have a giant head.”

“All very valid reasons to not confide in someone,” Wilbur nodded his head. “But I will have to clarify that I occasionally do ‘get bitches.’”

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows in disbelief. “Your lanky teacher ass gets bitches?”

“Emphasis on *occasionally* .”

“Oh! Nice to know that you haven’t been on a date for the past calendar year.”

Wilbur opened his mouth to protest but then frowned. “You’re a little shit, you know that?”

“Yeah, it’s one of my defining traits,” Tommy smiled.

A few beats of silence passed as a few cars sped past them. Dusk had quickly passed and the sky was now a dark navy. Tommy dropped his head as he focused on the shadows that dragged along the concrete. His anger had finally run cold and all that was left was the chill of guilt that sat in his chest. He fidgeted with the sticky end of the bandage on his hand. A reminder of another mistake he simply covered up and ignored.

He curled his fingers into a fist, trying to get feeling back into them. Wilbur, Phil, and Techno were always so kind to him. So why couldn’t he just trust them? Why did he have to be so defiant? What was he fighting against?

A hand touched his shoulder and Tommy raised his head. Wilbur was looking at him with a sympathetic gaze as he said, “I’m speaking from experience when I say that it’s not healthy to keep everything bottled up. You don’t have to face everything alone, okay?”

The teenager broke eye contact as he softly replied, “Yeah, I know.”

The words left a nasty taste on his tongue.

Wilbur patted his shoulder before giving him a slight push. “Now go to bed. That is an order from your boss.”

“I’m only listening to you this one time because I am tired of you saying you’re my boss.”

“I am your boss!”

One, two, three, less – the winter wind was sharp on his cheeks– *four, five, six, more* – and the wisps of his breath were lit up by the city lights beneath him– *one, two, three, less*– he was more than comfortable as he sprinted across rooftops; the movement warming his core and keeping him alert.

The young vigilante had no desire to think about his personal life as he increased and decreased his gravity in search of criminals. The atmosphere in his dorm room was almost as frigid as the air that covered the city.

Even if he wanted to have a conversation with Tubbo, his roommate was nowhere to be found outside of classes. Tommy had asked Ranboo once in a random spur of confidence where Tubbo was, but the least favorite roommate was quick to inform him that Tubbo was working overtime at the laboratories. After that Tommy had a feeling he has become the least favorite roommate.

Work wasn't much better. As much as he appreciated hanging out with Phil, Techno, and Wilbur, the days at the bookstore were slow. The routine of organizing books and checking out customers had lost its rhythmic peacefulness, but instead was replaced with a headache caused by the unruly thoughts that constantly buzzed throughout his head.

He was quick to find that the only way he could quiet the pounding in his head was when he donned his red hoodie and mask.

This night had been no different than the past six nights. Tommy had quickly returned from work to find himself greeted by an empty dorm room. He didn't care that his roommates had been increasingly absent from their shared space. It didn't bother him that he had seen Tubbo and Ranboo happily conversing earlier that day on campus. He hadn't spared a single moment to look at Tubbo's empty desk. And he most definitely did not consider wearing a red fanny pack. Instead, he changed into the rest of his vigilante gear and headed out to do the one thing that was keeping him sane.

Gravel crunched under his shoes as he stopped to check the time for what felt like the hundredth that night. For the past week, Tommy had dove head-first back into his friendly neighborhood vigilante duties. His mind was far away from encountering supervillains or superheroes as he focused on stopping car thieves, purse snatchers, and other various low-level criminals. He had even had another encounter with a cat in a tree who attempted to scratch his face off again.

However, tonight, he had his weekly training with Shockwave again. Tommy would never admit that he was excited to see the vibration-geezzer, but the warm buzz in his chest said otherwise. He still had an hour or so until their next lesson. He put his phone away, ignoring the fact that no matter how many times he checked, the time would not make it go any faster.

He started jumping along the roofs again, not really sure where he was headed. The moon was now high in the sky; the waning crescent shined with soft light and gave Tommy more than enough shadows to navigate between buildings.

Suddenly, the sound of a door slamming came from behind him. Tommy quickly changed his direction and peered over the ledge into the ally where the sound had come from.

A man grunted loudly as he dragged a large black bag out of the building. Something on his face glinted in the moonlight that caught Tommy's attention. The man was wearing a pair of blue and red sunglasses.

There was only one bastard that kept falling into Tommy's life that had blue and red sunglasses.

"Ayup! You're really still stealing stuff?" Tommy yelled as he floated down.

The sunglasses-man spun around in surprise. His eyebrows furrowed as he questioned, "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Clearly, you are stealing stuff," Tommy said as he pointed at the large bag in the sunglasses-man's hands.

"I am not even—" the man started.

Tommy didn't let him finish as he propelled himself forward, placing one hand on the bag and the other on the man. The man fell to his knees as Tommy snatched the bag from his hands.

"Let's see what you've got here," Tommy declared as he ripped the bag open.

The vigilante was slapped with the smell of coffee and bread. His eyes went wide as he realized he was staring into a bag filled with paper cups, napkins, and half-eaten pastries.

"Why are you stealing trash?" Tommy asked, confusion washing over his face.

"I am not stealing anything, you fucker! I was taking out the trash!" The man yelled, his palms still pressing into the pavement.

"Why would you take out the trash of the place you're robbing?"

"I work here! I am doing my job!"

Oh...*fuck*.

Tommy dropped the bag and the trash tumbled out onto the ground. Guilt spread throughout his shoulders as he immediately released his powers on the man. "I am so sorry. I thought you were—"

"Robbing this place? I wouldn't even think about it. My boss would kill me if I tried to cause any more damage," the man grunted as he began to pick up the pieces of garbage.

Tommy bent over to help clean up the mess. "Any more?" he asked before he picked up a cup that read 'Secret City Bakery.' He snapped his head up in realization. "You work for Niki?"

“Yeah?”

“Didn’t you destroy like half of her bakery with lasers?”

The bakery employee let out a sigh. “Don’t worry, she doesn’t let me forget it. Especially since she’s still taking a cut of my paycheck as payment.”

A few beats of silence passed between them as the two of them continued to clean up. Tommy always knew Niki was kind, but he had never thought that she would hire a person who threatened her livelihood.

“Please don’t think that Niki is getting involved with anything criminal,” the man requested, breaking the quiet.

Tommy shook his head. “I would never think that! Niki is one of the nicest people I know!”

“She’s pretty great, isn’t she? After I got out of jail, I decided to get my life together. But no matter how hard I tried, no one wanted to hire a superpowered felon. Except for one person.”

“Niki?”

The man nodded. “She gave me a second chance, even though I caused her nothing but problems.”

Tommy felt his gut twist. He knew what it was like to cause nothing but problems.

Instead of lingering on that thought, Tommy handed the final empty cup to the sunglasses-man and said, “Again, I am so sorry about attacking you.”

“It’s fine. You seem like you’ve been working pretty hard lately.”

“What do you mean?”

The man raised his eyebrow. “Haven’t you heard? The news won’t shut up about the lawless vigilante that keeps on terrorizing Logstedshire.”

“I’m not terrorizing anyone!” Tommy retorted.

“Ay! That’s what they’re just saying on the news! Don’t worry, the people of Logstedshire would gladly disagree with that superhero propaganda.”

“They would?”

“Yeah, it doesn’t go unnoticed when someone is going out of their way to help when the so-called heroes don’t do shit. If you asked people around here, they’d probably even call you a hero.”

Tommy felt his face heat up as he sputtered out, “I- I’m not a hero!”

The man shrugged off Tommy's counter. "Doesn't really matter what you think. People think you're better than all those showboat heroes and whatnot. There's no harm in taking the compliment. You're a good guy."

"But I'm not a good guy! I just assaulted you because I assumed you were robbing a place! How many other times do you think I hurt people on accident just because I thought I was doing the right thing? Or the fact that I helped people that criminals and fought against heroes!" Tommy lowered his head. "A few months ago I would have never even thought about lifting a finger against heroes. I feel like I've been making just worse and worse choices."

A loud crash came from the trash bin after the man launched the bag into it. He wiped his hands on his apron as he replied, "In your defense, the past two times you've seen me I *was* stealing things."

"But that doesn't matter! Still made a mistake and you were hurt by it!" Tommy's blurted out.

"Well I didn't really—" the man tried to interject, but Tommy couldn't stop the words from tumbling out.

"You were just trying to do your job and I got in the way! It seems like no matter what I do I just keep getting in the way. I'm trying to get better and I'm trying to learn, but for some reason, I just can't stop being stubborn! Why am I even doing this? Why am I here? Everyone else sits around letting the heroes do their jobs, why can't I? Everything I do is useless! At this point, it seems like I'm actually pushing people away!"

Tommy gripped his hair as he felt his eyes sting. "I keep on leaving a giant mess no matter where I go. I thought I could actually help people but instead, all I've been doing is making problems for people and making them worry about me. I'm a fucking dumbass."

A loud laugh made him snap his head up. The bakery employee with two-toned sunglasses wore a smug as he said, "You are right about that. You are a dumbass, but not because of anything you said."

Tommy looked up in confusion. "What?"

"Listen, as the guy who *you* literally stopped from destroying my current place of work, you have to stop being so hard on yourself. So you made a choice and it didn't work out. Okay? Fuck it! Now you know that choice was stupid and you shouldn't do it again. Do you know why the people of Logstedshire are fine with some random kid beating up criminals? Because at least the kid is *trying*. The heroes and police of this city don't give two shits about us. But you? You've been coming out here for weeks and you don't mind helping out even if it's below you. Honestly, I think people are surprised you're here for free!"

"I'm not a kid," Tommy mumbled in defiance.

The man rolled his eyes. "Yeah. Sure. Anyways my point is that we all make mistakes. What makes the difference is if you learn from those mistakes."

Tommy sighed. This random guy that he had beaten up three separate times was right. He always tried his very best when it came to being Vigilante. But maybe it was time to try to be better as Tommy too. If wasn't going to sit around helplessly as Vigilante, then he shouldn't sit around as Tommy either.

"Thanks... oh Prime, I don't even know your name. I think I've been calling you sunglasses-man this whole time," Tommy admitted.

"Well, you're not wrong. However, my name is Jack," Jack then stuck his hand out.

Tommy took his hand and shook it with a smile. "I'll let you get back to work, sorry again for jumping you. See ya around! Or maybe I don't want to see you around so I don't attack you again?"

"That would probably be ideal."

Tommy was comforted by the familiar sound of waves crashing into the docks. They were much calmer than the other nights he had been here, but they filled the air nonetheless. He checked his phone again and found that he was still 30 minutes early to his meeting with Shockwave.

He sighed as he rounded the corner to the place they had trained last week. However, he stopped in his tracks as he came across the red goggled thief leaning on a shipping container. Next to him was a larger man dressed in black who was focused on wiping his sword down.

"You're early," Shockwave announced as the two of them turned toward Tommy.

Tommy ignored his comment as he stared intensely at the new member of the docks. "Why is he here?"

"Nice to meet you too," Blade deadpanned.

"You specifically asked me to bring him. When you agreed to do this, you made it very clear that you didn't want to train with just me," Shockwave answered.

"Oh yeah," Tommy huffed. There had been quite a few things that had happened since his first real conversation with Shockwave. "I didn't think you'd actually convince him to come."

Shockwave straightened his coat. "I always follow through on my word."

"More like you're not important enough for us to lie to you," Blade commented.

“That too,” Shockwave shrugged.

“I am very important! You should always lie to me!” Tommy exclaimed. Then his face dropped as he registered his words. “Wait...”

Shockwave chuckled. “Oh okay, here I’ll give you one. You’re going to have a fantastic time training with Blade.”

“Wha-”

“Can we start?” Blade said flatly as he spun his sword into a fighting position. “It’s getting late.”

“Aw, do you have a bedtime, Blade?” Tommy taunted.

“Nah, but I heard you had one,” Blade replied as he motioned toward his ear.

The vigilante curled his fingers into a fist. He ignored the ache in his chest from the lack of a communicator in his ear.

“Not anymore,” Tommy answered with a clenched jaw. He then planted his feet to fight. “Let’s just get on with this.”

“Go easy on him, Blade,” Shockwave called out.

“I hope you die, Shockwave,” Tommy spat out.

“No promises,” Blade responded to his partner before leaping forward.

The next half hour consisted of Tommy narrowly getting sliced by a blade while Shockwave yelled “tips” from the sideline. Every time he attempted to land a hand on the swordsman, it was as if he knew what Tommy was going to do. He’d angle his sword and counter perfectly. Tommy tried every which way to use his powers to the best of his ability, but it seemed like Blade was just always there to butt him in the head with the end of his sword.

After a failed attempt to get near him by using a shipping crate as a launching pad and then getting slammed into the ground, Tommy groaned as he felt a bruise forming on his back. Blade stood over him barely even breathing hard.

“You’re so fucking lucky that Shockwave isn’t letting me throw a shipping container at you,” the vigilante murmured as he pushed himself onto his feet.

“As if I’d stay in one place long enough for you to throw anything at me,” Blade scoffed.

“I want you to be able to fight without using any outside resources!” Shockwave yelled.

“Blade gets to use his sword! That’s not fair!” Tommy exclaimed.

“Blade is named ‘Blade’ for a reason, dumbass,” Shockwave said as he walked over and threw a bottle of healing gel in his direction. “His weapon is a part of his powers.”

Tommy yanked open the bottle with his teeth before pouring the solution onto his scrapped hands. “What is your power anyways?” he asked, directing the question at the masked swordsman.

“I have the ability to master any weapon. Also heightened physical abilities,” Blade answered.

No wonder Tommy was getting his ass whooped. The dude was a master at fighting. He was slightly missing his training session with Shockwave from the week prior.

“If you’re so good at everything, why do you need the glorified megaphone?” Tommy asked as he pointed his thumb at Shockwave.

“Why the fuck are you coming for me?” Shockwave commented.

“We use him to open safes,” Blade admitted. “His powers might sound lame, but he’s actually pretty good at using them. Plus most of the jobs we have require stealth and he’s kind of the king of being quiet.”

“Really? That sounds like bullshit to me. He’s always talking my ear off,” Tommy countered.

“That’s not true!” Shockwave exclaimed. And then in a calmer tone continued, “I talk to you a normal amount.”

“Sure you do...” Tommy then turned his attention back to Blade. “So what’s the weirdest thing you’ve killed someone with?”

“Vigilante, I already told you we don’t kill people. We’re just thieves. People give us jobs and we do them,” Shockwave answered instead.

“I’m pretty sure assassins would say the same exact thing,” Tommy replied, still suspicious.

“I once stabbed a guy with a spoon,” Blade confessed.

Shockwave let out a groan as Tommy’s eyes went wide. The young vigilante let out a soft, “Cool.”

“Please refrain from disclosing past crimes with the vigilante,” the red-goggled man said, shaking his head.

Blade shrugged in response and the vigilante continued his questioning. “If you know how to use any weapon, why do you just use a sword?”

“I like swords. I also don’t mind knives.”

“What about axes?”

“I don’t like axes. Too bulky.”

Tommy smiled. “Me neither, they’re overrated.”

The vigilante, finally done with questions, took a few steps back as he positioned himself to fight again. "Alright, I'm ready to go again. I think I know what to do this time."

"Are you sure?" Shockwave asked, "we can end it here if you want—"

"No, I got this," Tommy interrupted.

"If he wants to try again, let him," Blade agreed as he also got ready.

"If you want to get beat up again that's on you," Shockwave gave in.

But Tommy had no intention of getting beat up again. He immediately sprang forward; his body flying toward Blade. However, his target wasn't the swordsman. Tommy dropped low and slid between Blade's legs and launched himself into Shockwave. The vibration-user yelped in surprise as Tommy bounced off of him and aimed to land on the back of his opponent.

Suddenly Blade snatched the vigilante out of the air by his hoodie and threw the blonde over his head. All night Blade hadn't allowed Tommy to land a finger on him, but that was alright. Tommy didn't need to touch Blade. Instead, the vigilante stretched out his arm and grazed the edge of the sword.

Tommy skidded backward onto the pavement as he increased the gravity of the weapon and Blade toppled forward, unable to lift it anymore. Without missing a beat Tommy raced forward, using his momentum to send a kick into the swordsman's chest.

"Nope," Blade's deep voice groaned as he gripped Tommy's ankle just as it was about to hit him.

He threw the blonde into the air, sending Tommy crashing straight into Shockwave.

"What the hell is wrong with you two!" Shockwave shouted as he pushed the vigilante off of him.

"Damn it, I was so close," Tommy mumbled as he lay on the ground in defeat.

"That was the closest you've gotten. Nice move with the sword," Blade noted as he dusted off his pants.

"Thanks," Tommy replied as he sat up with a soft smile.

"I wish I could have seen it," Shockwave's voice was filled with annoyance. "But unfortunately I was too busy getting used as a trampoline."

"You were a very good trampoline. You should consider changing your alias," Tommy smirked.

"Hey Blade, you know what, I don't mind if you stab him."

"At least I'll be getting stabbed by someone cooler than you."

Shockwave opened his mouth to probably give a lame comeback, but he was swiftly cut off by loud beeping. The two criminals looked down at their watches.

“How far out are we from North L’Manburg?” Blade asked.

“Not too far. Probably ten minutes without Angel,” Shockwave replied. He then turned to Tommy and said, “Sorry, Vigilante, but it seems like we’re going to have to cut this short. We’ll see you next week, alright?”

“I don’t know, that giant mouth of yours might send you to jail and I won’t ever have to hear your ugly voice again.”

“Blade, next week you are coming alone.”

The swordsman raised an eyebrow. “Heh? Who said I was coming next week?”

—

Tommy shoved his hands into his hoodie as he made his way back to his dorm. Even though his fingers and toes were starting to feel numb from being out in the cold all night, Tommy was in the best mood he had been in all week.

His talk with Jack along with successful training had given him a confidence boost. He was ready to make a change in his life! As much as he loved being a vigilante, he needed to be more present as Tommy. Maybe he would even attempt to be nice to Ranboo!

He frowned at the thought of his least favorite roommate. It would probably be best to take small steps first. His main plan of action was to apologize to Tubbo. Then he was going to ask if Tubbo had any spare gloves.

Nervousness churned in his stomach as he approached his school. A part of him was hoping to see his dorm room dark, but his heart skipped seeing the room light still on. He took a deep breath in before jumping onto the building and making his way down the wall.

Tommy noticed the blinds were closed as he neared the window. Just as he was about to peer in, he was stopped by faint voices.

“-just saying that there is no harm in being the bigger person,” Ranboo’s deep voice came first.

“The harm is that I’m always the one that has to be the bigger person!” Tubbo’s voice shot back.

A lump formed in his throat. They were talking about *him*.

“Don’t you want to resolve this?” Ranboo asked.

“I appreciate that you’re trying to help, but it’s no use. Tommy is a lost cause. He’s been stubborn and difficult for as long as I’ve known him and I’m done being fucking damage control,” Tubbo replied, his voice dripping with venom.

“Tommy is definitely... something else, but that doesn’t mean you should just stop being friends with him.”

“How is this on me? *He’s* the one that refuses to tell me anything! He hasn’t talked to me in a week! Fine! If he wants to be alone then so be it!”

“You don’t mean that. He’s your best friend.”

“You know what, Ranboo, I’m jealous of you! You should be glad that you don’t have to deal with him constantly! Being best friends with Tommy is exhausting! I do everything possible for him to stay in this school, to help him pass his classes, and to get him to do basic responsibilities! And don’t ask for anything in return, like a good fucking best friend! But the one thing he had on his own was to work with Dream! And you know what he did? He got fucking fired!”

“Didn’t he quit?”

“I don’t fucking know! He still hasn’t told me anything! Just another thing to add to the list of secrets he keeps from me! But I don’t care that he doesn’t tell me his deepest darkest secrets. I get it, he wants to be private about that stuff. That’s fine! You know what’s not fine? The fact that every time I try to care about his well-being, he brushes me off! He acts like I’m the crazy one for wanting to care about him!”

“Tubbo—”

“Don’t try to fucking convince me to make up with him. I told you. *I. Am. Done.* I want nothing to do with—”

Tommy ripped himself away from the conversation. His eyes were burning. He couldn’t listen to another word. He couldn’t be here anymore.

The wind whipped through his air as he raced as fast as he could away from the dorm building. He didn’t know where he was going and he didn’t care where he was going. He had been so fucking stupid for thinking that he could just go back to Tubbo after he had treated him.

Tubbo had always been there for him and it was clear that Tommy had been a shit friend. He was compulsive and defiant and stubborn. So fucking stubborn that he had lost the one person that actually had been giving a shit about him.

Tommy’s foot caught on the edge of something. No amount of gravity powers could have helped as he slammed onto the ground, his face catching his fall. He lay in defeat, the rough ground pressing into his face. It was useless. He was useless. He thought that he could do something good with his life, but the sad truth was that no matter what he did, he was doomed to ruin it all. This was his destiny.

Suddenly, gunshots rang throughout the air. Tommy shot up, his body moving faster than his thoughts. Screams and more gunshots sounded in the distance.

He took a step forward before stopping himself. Was he really going to continue doing this? Was he going to risk his life for strangers?

If his life was destined to fall apart, then so be it.

But he was going to do it on his own terms.

Tommy's vigilante urge pushed him towards the sound of immense danger. Keeping away from the main road, he looked down into dark alleyways for any sign of movement or sounds.

BANG! CLANG! BANG!

His head whipped to the right sharply as he saw two figures at the edge of his vision. They were engaging in a fast melee, their movements almost too quick for Tommy to follow. One of the figures wielded a long sword as the other was shooting defensively at the quick slashes.

Wait. Tommy recognized that sword.

He had just fought against that sword earlier that night.

But that couldn't be right. This swordsman was moving at a rate Tommy had never seen before. Blade was fast, but something about this guy's movements was inhuman. *Monstrous*.

The other man was also dodging at an incredible speed, setting off shots every few seconds. However, the swordsman deflected each of them, ricocheting the bullets into the walls surrounding them. The other man was moving back to avoid the sharp edge, but he didn't have much room left. He was only a few feet from the dead end of the alleyway, but the swordsman was not letting up.

The man with the gun slightly looked behind him, but the swordsman took advantage of this and slashed the man's hand with the gun. The other man screamed as blood poured out of the wound. As the man watched the red drop from his hand, the swordsman gripped the man's shirt and raised him in the air, pointing the sword at his chest.

No. This wasn't happening. Shockwave said they were just thieves.

"Blade!" Tommy shouted as his feet slammed into the pavement. "What the fuck are you doing?!"

The two pairs of eyes focused on him, one bright red and the other glowing gold. Both radiating power that he had never felt before.

Tommy was frozen as he watched the sword exit the red-eyed man's back.

Chapter End Notes

And now we can finally get to the plot :D buckle in y'all

(if you see any spelling mistakes or grammar mistakes please forgive me I honestly had a hard time with this chapter lol)

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Twitch: TheUntitledArtist

Rule #12: Don't Get Eggs with Your Cheeseburger

Chapter Summary

Tommy just wants a cheeseburger. With no eggs.

Chapter Notes

howdy :) this is a bad boy so please remember to read the trigger warnings and stay safe
<3
(i also updated the fic tags! So please check that too!)

TW: graphic depictions of fighting, wounds, dead body, and blood; panic attack, repeated words; derealization, dissociation; near-death images and descriptions; hospital descriptions.

((and I'm leaving a good ol' space because we jump right into the drama oof also if you see any spelling or grammar mistakes to remember to close your eyes :D))

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The red-eyed man's body hit the ground with a sickening *thump* . Tommy clasped his hand over his mouth as the blood began to pool underneath the unmoving body. Person. Human. Someone alive just moments ago.

However, the feeling of the contents of his stomach crawling up his neck was the least of his problems. A low guttural growl made Tommy rip his eyes away from the lifeless body and a

shiver ran down his spine as his eyes connected with gold.

There was no doubt in Tommy's mind now. Across from him, covered in someone else's blood was the man who had been training him just hours ago. *Blade*.

When was Blade able to move like that? Didn't Shockwave say they didn't kill people? Was the red-eyed man like the iceman? Did this have to do with the Egg? What did Blade have to do with the Egg? Where was Shockwave—

He didn't have time to address the thousands of questions rattling in his mind. He needed to move. He had to leave. He needed his legs to move. *Why wouldn't they mov-*

Suddenly Blade lunged at him, his blade slicing through the air next to him. Thankfully, Tommy's adrenaline kicked in and he flung himself to the side, his arm stinging as Blade's sword barely nicked him. Tommy didn't spare a glance as he immediately spun away from his opponent and sprinted down the alleyway. A powerful roar tore through the air as if a predator had just barely missed its prey.

And Tommy knew very well that he was the prey in question.

He burst out of the alley and scrabbled into the open street. Squinting in the bright lights, his ears filled with the sounds of car horns and engines. He whipped his head around trying to reorient himself to his new surroundings just as a car screeched to a halt in front of him, barely stopping before hitting him.

A man stuck his head out of the car window and yelled, "Get the fuck out of the street!"

Tommy stuck up his hands in defense, "You don't under—"

But he didn't finish as Blade shot out of the dark alley and dug his sword into the hood of the car.

"Fuck!" Tommy shouted as screams filled the air. People immediately scrambled out of their cars and ran in the opposite direction.

However, this didn't stop Blade. He wrenched his sword out of the car and began slashing at the vigilante. Tommy decreased and increased his gravity as he flew through the air, narrowly dodging the sharp edge. He ducked as Blade shoved his sword into a car window, shattering the glass. The vigilante rolled out of the way and once again started the deadly dance between him and Blade's weapon.

Even though it seemed like the swordsman was targeting him, Tommy knew he had to get this fight away from innocent civilians. Not to mention, the police and heroes were mostly like on their way now and they would only escalate the situation even more. Blade flung his sword again and Tommy launched himself backward, resulting in him smashing into a car. But a new sound made him whip his head around.

A young boy was crouched and softly crying behind the car he had just rammed into.

Shit.

Shit.

Fuck—

Tommy jumped over the car and grabbed the boy in one arm and firmly planted his other hand on the car and directed its gravity at Blade. Then the car launched forward and directly slammed into the villain who flew into a wall.

“It’s okay,” Tommy whispered to the boy who had now buried his face into Tommy’s shoulder. “I know it’s scary, but you’re going to be okay.”

But will I? he thought silently.

It didn’t matter. Vigilante had a job right now. He kicked open the door of the nearest shop to find a small group of people staring at him with wide eyes.

“You all need to leave this area immediately!” Tommy shouted in a stern voice.

However, they all just kept staring at him. He didn’t have time for this bullshit. The car was not going to keep Blade distracted for much longer.

“NOW!” Tommy shouted, his voice much louder.

Without missing a beat, all the people began to hurry out of the store. Amid the chaos, Tommy stopped a woman and pushed the young boy into her arms.

“Please also get him to a safe area,” he requested.

The woman nodded before running away from him.

As much as he wanted to make sure the woman and the boy got to safety, a loud crash rang behind him, signaling the fact that his fight was not over. Tommy took a deep breath in before turning to see the dark-clothed swordsman step out of the crumbling wall.

There was no time to think of what was going to happen to them. He needed to finish this fight as fast as possible.

“Ayo! Blade!” Tommy shouted.

Gold eyes locked on him again and Tommy ignored the feeling of his stomach flipping.

Tommy continued with pseudo-confidence, “Even with your new tricks, you’ve barely even touched me! Come on, man! This is just embarrassing.”

His taunt worked its magic as Blade sprinted toward the vigilante. Tommy immediately decreased his gravity and shot up to the top of the building. His feet slammed onto the roof and he started running. He didn’t need to look behind him to know that his opponent was following him. The scrapping and growling were more than enough.

His body was moving on autopilot as he leaped across rooftops. He was trying to keep up with his scrambling thoughts, grasping at any type of plan to stop the swordsman. Even during their training lessons—when Blade was supposedly going easy on him—, Tommy had never landed a finger on him. How the hell was he supposed to stop this man?

Man? More like beast , Tommy thought. *If I could just close enough to touch him then I could just increase his gravity—*

Suddenly, the young vigilante was dragged backward. He felt his hair whip his face as he fell out of the air and crashed into the pavement. His back screamed in pain but Blade stood over him, his sword aiming for his eyes. Tommy rolled out of the way as the sword sunk into the place he had just been.

Then it clicked. The sword.

Tommy jumped up to his feet; his breaths were quick and shallow now. He found himself in another empty alleyway surrounded by tall brick walls. He glanced behind him to find a dead end. He furrowed his eyebrows as the exit was being blocked by the man who wanted to skewer him.

He slightly shifted and felt his thighs spasm. It was clear from the last chase that he couldn't outrun Blade. He had no choice but to try his dumb plan.

Or die trying.

"I know you're not one for talking, Blade," Tommy said with a clenched jaw. "But growling? Really? I didn't take you for being a furry wannabe."

"eed... ood..." Blade growled in response.

Tommy almost let out a laugh. "What was that? You seriously need to speak up."

"WE...NEED... *BLOOD* !" the swordsman roared before launching himself at the vigilante.

"Shi—!" Tommy yelped as felt the sword slice the air above him just as he dropped down to the ground and slid between Blade's legs.

His opponent pivoted and immediately swung again, but Tommy decreased his gravity, jumping over his head. The vigilante twisted himself in the air and allowed his feet to hit the wall before springing forward again. He stretched his fingers out, reaching for the sword. All he needed was a touch—*fuck*— Blade stuck up his arm and struck Tommy with the back of his fist. The vigilante flung back into the wall with a *crack* . His bruises were getting their own bruises at this point.

He shakily got up, meeting the golden eyes once more. Tommy could tell that he was now running on adrenaline reserves. His legs were shaking and his vision was speckled with black dots. The taste of metal filled his mouth and his heart was pounding in his ears, drowning out all his thoughts.

Except for one:

Get the sword.

“That was a lucky hit,” Tommy said before spitting out the blood onto the ground. “I’m not going to let you have another.”

A snarl rumbled from Blade before he shot forward. His sword arched high, straight for Tommy’s head.

Just like he wanted it to.

The vigilante stuck his arms up and caught the sword with his bare hands. The sharp blade dug deep into his palm and he immediately felt wetness run down his arms. It took a second before he registered that his hands were screaming in pain.

He clenched his jaw shut as Blade attempted to pull the sword out of his grip, but it was too late. Tommy increased the gravity of the weapon and it was wrenched out of his opponent’s hand and clattered to the ground.

Now Tommy was face to face with Blade, his golden eyes piercing into him. Close enough.

“No more lucky hits,” Tommy smirked.

Then the two of them moved at the same moment. Blade reached for his belt—presumably for a new weapon—but Tommy’s task was much easier. He pushed his bloody hands into the Blade’s chest and used all of his powers to send him flying into the wall.

Blade bellowed in defiance as Tommy bound his gravity to the brick; the invisible force pressing him into an unmovable position.

He had done it. The young vigilante fell to his knees as the exhaustion of the fight finally hit him. He slightly moved his sticky, red-covered fingers, the pain pulsating through them. He had actually done it. There was so much blood on his hands that he couldn’t even tell how deep the cuts were. He squeezed his eyes shut as the nausea of seeing the gashes washed over him. He had stopped Blade.

But at what cost?

—

Tommy didn’t know how much time passed as he sat with his eyes closed. However, the sounds of footsteps made his head snap up. It seemed like the theme of the night was that Tommy wasn’t allowed to have a break.

Two figures slowly came into his vision as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. The moonlight reflected in the red eyewear of one of the figures. Tommy’s mouth went dry.

Fuck.

It was Shockwave and Angel.

His hands stung as he began to push himself up. He then felt someone grab his arm, but Tommy immediately swatted away the hand.

“Don’t fucking touch me,” Tommy hissed as he made eye contact with the man with red goggles.

“You’re hurt, Vigilante,” Shockwave answered softly. “You need–”

“I said, *don’t fucking touch me*,” Tommy’s voice now rising.

Shockwave took the hint and stepped back near Angel. The two of them stood in front of Blade who was still hopelessly struggling against the pressure of gravity.

“If I touch him, will he be able to escape?” Angel asked in a flat tone.

“No. He won’t be able to move for a while or until I release my powers on him,” Tommy answered. A frown had permanently cemented itself on his face as he spoke. He had no desire to be talking to any of them right now, but the faster they could get Blade away from him the better for Tommy.

“Understood,” Angel replied before pulling out a syringe. He turned towards Blade who was now roaring again as the winged villain stepped towards him. Angel jabbed the needle into the swordsman's neck and the effect was immediate. His gold eyes rolled back and he slumped forward, unconscious.

“What- you know what? I don’t give a shit. Is he out?” Tommy questioned.

“Yes, he is unconscious now. You can let him go now,” Angel confirmed and Tommy released his powers on Blade. The large man slid down the wall, his limbs limp.

“Well, there ya go. Now please take the fucking murderer very far away from me,” the vigilante spat out.

Shockwave shared a glance with Angel before taking a small step toward Tommy again.

“Don’t you fuckin dare,” Tommy hissed. He tensed his hands, feeling the blood stick his fingers together.

Shockwave held up his hands cautiously. “We can’t just leave you to bleed out here. If you just let us–”

“Let you do what? Sick your fucking partner on me again?” Tommy was now shouting, anger– or maybe it was fear–enveloping his body. “Maybe let him finish the job just like how he finished the other guy you left him with? Huh?! Did you know that he fucking stabbed a guy earlier?! I watched him impale him like he was a fucking piece of meat!”

“I am so sorry that you had to see that, Vigilante. But it’s not what you think—”

“Not what I think?” Tommy let out a cold laugh. His head was pounding along with his heart, his body was shaking with each word. “You’re fucking joking! Do you expect me to believe a word out of your fucking mouth?! ‘*We’re just thieves*’ I’m so fucking stupid! Why would I ever believe that criminals could actually help? All that happened was to create more destruction! Innocent people almost got hurt because of my stupid fucking mistakes!”

“Vigilante—”

He gripped his hair with sticky hands and his breathing began to quicken as more words tumbled out. “I should have never saved you! I just should have let fucking Dream arrest you! You should be rotting in jail! I thought I was doing something good! I thought was a better person, but instead, I just ruined everything!”

“Wait—”

“I’m selfish and stupid and so fucking dumb! I should have never done this! I can’t even trust my own best friend! And for what? To almost dying to the people I trusted instead? I’m ruining my life! I’ve ruined everything! I can’t—”

“ **Tommy!** ”

The villain’s vibrations sent a slight breeze through the air as Tommy’s voice caught in his throat. Stillness fell between them.

...what... the... fuck...

“Please just listen to me,” Shockwave said calmly, breaking the silence.

Tommy’s eyes were wide as he took a large step away from the red goggled villain. “What...?” his voice barely a whisper.

WHAT THE FUCK?

“I can explain everything if you just—” The villain started as he reached for his goggles.

“Shockwave—” Angel’s voice faintly came from behind.

But Tommy was done. It was over. He had lost everything.

His voice exploded as anger shook his body, “NO! DON’T SAY *ANOTHER FUCKING WORD* ! I want *nothing* to do with you! None of you! I don’t fucking care what you know! I don’t care! You all are fucking insane! Don’t touch me! Don’t speak to me! I don’t want you or your fucking partners to *ever come near me ever again. And that is a fucking threat.*”

Shockwave opened his mouth to counter, but Tommy never gave him the chance. With his last bit of energy, he lifted himself to the rooftops, leaving the villains in the darkness.

Tommy had only made it past two buildings when his powers gave out. He tumbled behind an empty building and slowly slid down the wall as his legs gave out. He ripped off his mask with one hand and pulled out his phone with his other. His blood seeped into the cracks of his shattered phone screen as he typed in the only person in the world he wanted to talk to. The only person in the world he needed to talk to.

The dialing tone droned loudly as he craned his neck to look up. He forced his eyes open to gaze at the dark blue sky. The moon seemed to be hidden; its light barely outlined a cloud's nebulous edges. However, this allowed the few stars that were out to shine a bit more brightly.

He was tired. His mind was tired of thinking. His body was tired of moving. He didn't want to think about Blade's sword digging into his hands. He didn't want to think about his body cracking against the pavement. He didn't want to think about the fact that Shockwave knew his name. He didn't want to think about Prime knows what—or who—else Shockwave knew.

He was tired of trying and messing up. He was tired of being a failure. He just wanted everything to simple again. Like when he used to go stargazing with Tubbo.

Suddenly he heard his phone click. His roommate's voice sleepily came through, *"Tommy?"*

"Hey Tubbo," Tommy greeted, a soft smile forming on his face. Tubbo was mad at him but still picked him his call. Tubbo was a good friend.

A beat passed as Tommy continued to focus on the stars above him. It was clear that the stargazing was much better in Logstedshire than wherever the hell he was.

"Uh...Did you want to talk about something?" Tubbo questioned, a bit more awake now.

"Do you remember when we used to sneak out and look at the stars in Logstedshire? You were always so good at identifying the big dipper," Tommy answered, his mind felt foggy. Kind of like the cloud that covered the moon. He wondered what shape the moon was. He had forgotten.

"Um, I guess I do. What brought this on though?"

"I remember that we used to get in so much trouble from the foster agency that we kept on meeting up even though we were in different houses. We always met up somewhere in the middle," Tommy felt a lump in his throat and swallowed hard before continuing, "we always met up...didn't we? Except for now. I couldn't meet up with you. I messed up, Tubbo. I messed up everything. I- I am sorry. I am so sorry."

His eyes stung as he felt wetness trail down his cheeks. He gripped his phone tighter as he waited for a reply. He needed a reply.

After what felt forever, Tubbo's voice finally came through. *"It's okay, Tommy. I'm sorry too."*

Relief washed over him like a cold wave. He shivered in the calm that flooded his mind. He focused on one last star before allowing his tired eyes to close. The moon's shape would remain a secret.

"You have nothing to be sorry for Tubbo. I'm the one that's the problem. I caused you so many issues. I'm sorry for being the worst friend ever," he said before letting the phone fall from his hand to the ground. He couldn't even feel his fingers anymore.

Tubbo let out a soft chuckle. *"You aren't the worst friend ever. You're just dramatic."*

"I am, but you don't have to worry about me anymore," Tommy choked out. Even his closed eyes couldn't stop the tears from flowing. "I just wish... I just wish we could have seen the stars in Logstedshire together one more time."

"Now don't say that. We can go visit Logstedshire soon, don't worry. Where are you anyways?" Tubbo's voice was beginning to sound distant now. Tommy's chest ached. He didn't want to be far away from Tubbo. Tubbo was his friend. His best friend.

"You're a good friend. I'm going to miss you."

"Tommy. Where are you?" Tubbo's voice was urgent now. Tommy didn't like that. He didn't want Tubbo to worry about him. But he was tired.

"I'm really sorry. I'm so sorry. I am sorry," he wanted to keep talking to his friend. He wanted to be with his friend. But he was just so tired.

"Tommy! Where are you?! Please! Tommy! Tom..."

But the young vigilante had nothing left to say as fog enveloped the last of his thoughts.

—

It was dark where he was. An all-consuming emptiness surrounded him. A void.

Tommy never minded the dark though.

It was nothing that bothered him.

The numbness of nothing.

He couldn't feel anything. He couldn't see anything.

He didn't like that he couldn't do anything, but just exist. Just exist in the void of wherever the hell he was.

Maybe if this was his void he could do what he wanted here. He wanted a cheeseburger.

No cheeseburger appeared.

Shit.

Wait, could he even have a cheeseburger? Did he even have a stomach? Did he even have a mouth?

The void fucking sucked.

No sound. No light. No feeling. No cheeseburger. Just Tommy.

He was truly alone now.

Maybe this is what he deserved. Alone and nothing.

BLF ZIV MLG ZOLMV, a thousand voices stacked on top of each other suddenly echoed from the void.

If Tommy had a body, he would have probably jumped out of his skin.

BLF ZIV MLG MLGSRMT, the voices continued.

The voices were loud—really loud—but Tommy didn't care. They were something else. They were something that wasn't nothing.

DV XZM SVOK BLF. DV XZM TREV BLF DSZG BLF DZMG.

That sounded nice. He didn't have anything right now. He didn't even have a mouth for a cheeseburger.

BVH. DV XZM TREV BLF VEVIBGSRMT. OVG FH TFRWV BLF. OVG FH SVOK.

Tommy liked getting things... the voices were nice...

He liked being guided... it was simple... easy...

He liked having help... he needed help...

DV XZM TREV BLF KLDVI. ORHGVM GL FH. BLF ZIV GSV PVB. ZXXVKG FH.

Oh... that sounded easy... nice... he just had to listen...

Wait.

Tommy didn't want power though.

He didn't want to be a key.

And fucking hated being told what to do.

He wanted a cheeseburger.

BLF SZEY YVVM XSLHVM. WL MLG IVHRHG.

These fucking voices were bossy. All Tommy wanted was a fucking cheeseburger.

BLF NFHG ZXXVKG FH. GSRH RH BLFI WVGHRMB.

For a thousand ominous voices stacked on top of each other, these guys were dumb as shit. Who cares about destiny? Who cares about keys? The only key he cared about was the key to open the door to the closest Mr. Beast Burger.

BLF ZIV Z ULLO. BLF XZM MLG WVMB BLFI WVGHRMB. BLF XZM MLG WVMB GSV VTT.

Why the fuck were the voices going on about eggs? Was this about his burger? Were they saying that Tommy had to get an egg on his burger? No, no, no. Tommy just wanted a regular burger but also cheese, tomato, lettuce, onions, and mustard. No ketchup. No ketchup. Too red. Too sticky. But he was fine with pickles, though.

RU BLF XLMGRMFV GL IVHRHG BLF DROO UZXV GSV XLMHVJFVMXVH. GSV VTT DROO ZODZBH KIVEZRO.

Tommy didn't want an egg on his burger! Eggs were only good scrambled! Tubbo made a good omelet though. He missed Tubbo. Tubbo wasn't the void. If he was here though, Tubbo probably would hate egg on his burger too.

GSV VTT DROO URMW Z DZB, GLNNB RMMRG. BLF DROO ZXXVKG FH.

These voices had the worst customer service ever. Tommy didn't want anything to do with the egg! Especially on his burger! Which one of these thousand voices was the manager?

BLF SZEY NZWV Z TIZEV NRHGZPV. BLF DROO MLG IVHRHG. BLF XZM MLG IVHRHG GSV KLDVI LU GSV VTT, GLN-

“-my!! Please!” A different voice screamed, shaking his body.

Tommy jolted up as he yelped, “Cheeseburger!”

“What?” the new voice asked softly.

Tommy blinked a few times as his vision slowly adjusted to the darkness. He was no longer in a void of darkness and instead was in some dirty backstreet.

However, Tommy didn't care about that as he sat stunned by what was in front of him.

He was facing a young brunette with wide blue eyes who gripped his shoulders. *Tubbo*.

Tommy blinked a few more times to make sure what he was seeing. Was Tubbo actually there? Or was he just imagining voices again?

He lightly touched his roommate's shirt and whispered, "Are you real?"

Suddenly Tommy was pulled into a tight embrace. He immediately sunk into the warmth, ignoring the stabbing pains of his many injuries. He softly chuckled, "I'll take this as a yes."

"You're so fucking stupid," Tubbo choked out as he pulled away from the hug. His eyes were puffy and red, but he wore a soft smile. "You are stupid and I hate you."

Tommy leaned back into the brick to try to get more comfortable, but his whole body protested with sharp pangs. Oh yeah. He was incredibly hurt. He smiled the best he could and replied, "I think you forgot to mention that I'm stupid."

Tubbo lightly laughed before his eyes fell on Tommy's hands. A beat passed and then Tubbo began, "Did you—"

"All this blood is mine," Tommy answered. "I fucked up."

His roommate let out a soft sigh of relief. "More like you *got* fucked up."

"I'll have you know, this is the result of me *winning*."

"Maybe you should lose more often."

"Fuck you!" Tommy attempted to punch Tubbo, but his hand just lightly brushed his shoulder instead.

"Alright, Big Man. Don't get ahead of yourself," Tubbo replied, gently taking Tommy's hand and resting it on his lap again.

Tommy stared at his sliced and bloody hands. Most of the blood had turned dark and tacky, but it seemed like every time he moved a finger he would reopen the wounds. Reminders of his actions.

Tommy opened his mouth to speak but was swiftly cut off.

"You scared me," Tubbo's voice was shaking. His smile had faded. "You really scared me."

"I'm sorry," the blonde lowered his gaze. It was all he could say. "I am so sorry."

Tubbo leveled his breathing before speaking again, "It's okay. You're alive and that's what matters."

Tommy tried to nod his head, but his body wasn't allowing for that.

“Not to mention, if you die then they’re going to stick me with a new roommate and I hate meeting new people.”

A painful laugh escaped his lungs before he burst into a coughing fit.

“Okay, so no more jokes until you’ve reached a hospital. Got it,” Tubbo noted before wrapping his arm around his roommate and lifting him off the ground.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow,” Tommy groaned as he leaned into his buff roommate and they began walking. “When did you get ripped?”

“I’m not ripped, you just don’t weigh anything.”

“Hey! I have a lot of muscles! I am a strong man!”

“Mhm, sure. I *totally* believe you.”

“I can’t believe you would use sarcasm with an injured person.”

“You’re injured? I would have *never* guessed!”

“You are gaslighting me, *again* !”

His gaslighting roommate laughed as the two of them continued to make their way slowly to the main road.

Then Tubbo turned to Tommy with a confused look. “Wait, when you woke up, why the fuck did you yell ‘cheeseburger’?”

—

Once Tubbo had lugged him to the nearest hospital, he kicked open the door to the emergency room yelling about how Tommy had been jumped by a dozen giant men or something like that. He didn’t remember much after he was pushed into a hospital cot and whisked away by numerous nurses. However, he did remember that someone cut his sweatshirt in half to examine his wounds.

Shame. Tommy had liked that sweatshirt. But then again, there wasn’t much use for it anymore. He had made up his mind.

At some point, he must have passed out because before he knew it, he slowly forced his crusty eyes open. He frowned at the terrible taste that coated his tongue and glanced around for some water. There was a bottle on the table, but when he began to reach for it he was met with multiple sharp aches. He looked down to find his hands wrapped in bandages.

“Doctor said not to move them,” Tubbo’s voice came from across the room. He stretched his arms as he rose from the small padded chair in the corner. “He said you’re lucky that the cuts didn’t do any major damage to your nerves.”

“Did you sleep—AH!” Tommy yelped as his back spasmed when he moved to sit up.

“The doctor actually said that you’re not supposed to move anything. You broke a few ribs too.”

Well, that explained the soreness in his chest every time he breathed. “In that case, can you help me get a sip of water?” Tommy asked.

“I got ya, Boss Man,” Tubbo replied as he grabbed a bottle of water with a straw and allowed Tommy to sip.

“Thanks,” Tommy said after gulping down all the water in only a few seconds.

“It’s no problem. How are you feeling now?” Tubbo asked pulling up his chair next to Tommy’s bed.

“My body is throbbing all over, but other than that, I think I’m okay,” Tommy admitted.

As much as ‘almost getting impaled’ can be okay, he thought.

“Good, good. I’m glad,” Tubbo nodded.

Silence fell between them, the only sounds filling the air were the random beeps and boops of the various machines he was connected to. Tommy hadn’t been in many hospitals, but he had been to the med bay a few times when he worked at the Heroes’ Headquarters. The similarities between the two were more than enough to remind Tommy that he didn’t enjoy the sterile, plain, lifeless feeling of the clean tile floors and bleached white sheets. Even the chemical cleaner smell was starting to sting his nose.

“How about you?” Tommy asked after finally reaching his limit of sitting quietly. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m alright. This chair isn’t the most comfortable bed, but it does its job.”

“Did you sleep here last night? Why would you do that?”

Tubbo let out a soft chuckle. “Tommy, you’ve been out for three days. There was no way I was going to let you out of my sight.”

“Three days?! I’ve been asleep for three days?! Why didn’t you wake— OW!” Another sharp stab in his back reminded him of his restrictions.

“Your body clearly needed the rest, dumbass. The doctor said it was good that you were taking time to recover.”

“How did you even convince them to let you stay? You have school and work!”

Tubbo leaned in with a smirk and whispered, “I told them we were half-brothers that were separated at birth after our awful father left me in a box on the side of the road,” Tubbo sat up and resumed speaking in a regular volume, “Then I found you beaten up on the side in an alleyway after we had planned to meet up. And then I heroically carried your bloody body for miles to this hospital and that’s how we ended up here.”

“Well, that’s elaborate. But that doesn’t explain how you’re currently getting out of school and work- *shit!* How am *I* getting out of school and work?!”

“I think you have a pretty good excuse for being absent,” Tubbo deadpanned. “My excuse, on the other hand, is that I found my roommate half-dead on the side of the road. And the best part is that we don’t have to take our winter exams!”

“Really? Fuck yeah!” Tommy smiled. A win is a win. But the happiness was short-lived. “What about the bookstore? Did you tell them what happened? Did they come by?”

“Oh... um,” Tubbo’s eyes broke away. “I tried to call the store to tell them what happened since we got here, but no one has been picking up. I even told Ranboo to get in contact with Mr. Soot for me, but apparently, there’s been a sub for him for the past three days as well. I would have gone to check myself, but I didn’t want to leave—”

“It’s fine, Tubbo. Thank you for trying,” Tommy softly smiled. The ache in his chest wasn’t just from his broken ribs anymore.

So much for ‘wanting the best for him.’

“Regarding my work excuse,” Tubbo continued, “all I had to do was call Sam about the situation. He allowed me as much time off as I needed. This is the first time I’ve actually taken a break and, as much as I love my job, I am so glad that I did. I haven’t felt this clear-headed in a while. I didn’t realize how much it had been weighing on me.”

“I bet I didn’t help with that,” The blonde lowered his head. “I’m sorry for burdening you with all of this. You deserve better.”

“No! You are not a burden!” Tubbo burst, making his roommate look up in surprise. “Please don’t say that! I shouldn’t be upset if you want to keep things to yourself. It was unfair of me to ask you if you trusted me. I put you in a difficult position and I am sorry. I really am. I think... I think I was afraid that you didn’t need me anymore.”

Tommy’s heart sank. “Tubbo, that’s not true. That will never be true. I will always need you.”

“No, no, it’s okay if you don’t,” His roommate smiled before continuing, “But now that you mention it...”

“What?”

A smirk crawled across Tubbo’s face. “You’re being extremely clingy right now.”

“I hate you. I take everything back. I cannot stand you,” Tommy said, turning his face away.

“Bold thing to say as a guy who is currently bedridden.”

“Die,” nice to know Tommy still had his epic comeback skills.

“Hey, that’s not fair! I can’t joke about that!” Tubbo crossed his arms with a frown.

“Ha! Sucks to suck I guess,” now it was Tommy’s turn to smirk.

His roommate rolled his eyes before leaning forward. “If you don’t mind me asking, what even happened? I thought you had just gone for patrol.”

Tommy opened his mouth to answer, but he stopped himself. What *had* happened? He wished he fidget with his hands, but he knew better. His memories of the night were messy because the night had been messy. Instead, Tommy traced the quilted pattern of his blanket with his eyes.

What had he even done before his near-death experience?

He had that run-in with Jack and then his lesson with—Oh yeah—Shockwave and Blade. The guy who tried to kill him and the guy who knew his secret identity. And then there was eavesdropping on the conversation between Tubbo and Ranboo. He couldn’t bring that up. He had just made up with Tubbo... He also probably shouldn’t mention the part where he saw a man get impaled. But what about the weird thing with the void and the voices—

“A lot,” Tommy answered, squeezing his eyes shut. “Too much.”

“You don’t have to talk about it,” Tubbo softly replied. “If you want, I can show you what I saw working on while you were sleeping!”

Tommy nodded. “Go ahead.”

His roommate reached below him and let pulled out a notebook. He quickly flipped through the lined pages until his eyes lit up. He turned the book around, displaying a page filled with various pencil scratches and drawings.

Drawings of a shirt? No. It was a *hoodie*.

Tommy felt a pit form in his stomach.

“Unfortunately your outfit for the *afterschool activity* was ripped in half when they were fixing you up, but that’s no problem! It just means I can make you a new one!” Tubbo happily explained. “I was thinking of maybe figuring out a way to add some sort of armor. And gloves! However, I know your powers work through your hands so I’d have to figure out a way to allow them to pass through. We could also do fingerless gloves! What are your thoughts on that?”

“This is nice and all, but—”

“You’re right. Fingerless gloves wouldn’t help protect anything. Not to mention your hands probably already get cold!”

“Hey, Boss Man—”

“Have you thought about carrying weapons? I know you try to end things peacefully, but I feel like a taser might be a good choice—”

“Tubbo!” Tommy forcefully interrupted.

Tubbo froze mid-page flip. “Sorry, I got carried away,” he apologized sheepishly.

The blonde let out a soft sigh. “It’s alright. I just... um... I needed to tell you something about the *afterschool activity* .”

“What’s up? Is it about the hoodie? You know, I can make pants too if you’d like?”

“No, no. I really appreciate the offer but...”

For the past few months, he had tried his best to be a better person. That’s what he thought he needed when ~~Dream fired him~~ he quit being Dream’s butler. But what had his efforts brought him? He was failing school. He was failing his best friend. He barely functioned at work. He couldn’t even get along with a guy who had been nothing but kind to him.

The previous night had been the final straw. He had trusted the wrong people and it had landed him in a hospital bed. Time after time he had just made the wrong choices. He couldn’t continue like this. He was tired of making the wrong choices.

“... I don’t want to be Vigilante anymore.”

Chapter End Notes

. . . oKaY? whY dE fRick? diD kisS rOss jUst puNcH chRis rOss iN DE PEN-

((Sorry for the bit of the wait! Lol I took a bit of a break to focus on other things like editing and streaming! If you're enjoying this story and would like to support me and ALL my work please consider following me on [Twitch](#) and subscribing to my [YouTube](#) channel! I'm hoping to post and stream more and I'd love to see y'all there!))

((Again I appreciate all the love you've given to this story and I promise I have a whole lot more fun planned for y'all even if it takes a bit of time <3 thank you again it means the world to me :D hope you have a wonderful rest of your day/night!))

(ALSO! most of the time people solve the coded words fairly quickly in my discord! so go check out there if you'd like to know the unscrambled dialogue but lol I'm not just gonna tell ya the answers lol)

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

Twitch: <https://www.twitch.tv/theuntitledartist>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWMvQYN0oRCzngU82UbQR4g>

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Tubbo and The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Chapter Summary

It's not actually *that* bad, but also it isn't ideal.

Chapter Notes

well, will you look at that! it's a perfectly timed Tubbo chapter! Yay! We love a good old POV change :D

(also if you see misspellings,,, don't worry about it,,, chill,,, take a chill pill,,,)

TW // a little bit of fighting at the end

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So what do you remember about two main types of cells?” Tubbo asked, flipping to the next page of the biology textbook.

“Oh, I know this one!” Tommy exclaimed, “There are the prolific cells for bacteria and other little shits and then the yucky cells for the rest of us!”

“You’re almost right,” Tubbo chuckled. “The correct pronunciation is prokaryotic cells and eukaryotic cells, but you were right about describing them.”

“I’ll take it! Almost right!”

Tubbo shook his head as Tommy enthusiastically pumped his fist. The two of them had been working in the library all afternoon as the rest of their peers were focusing on studying for winter exams. The two of them were excused from the exams, but their teachers still expected the two of them to turn in all their homework.

It had been a week since the hospital finally released Tommy and Tubbo had the great honor of helping his best friend catch up on all his studying. The problem was that Tommy had already been pretty far behind before he was stuck in a hospital bed.

“Alright, Boss Man. What organelles do eukaryotic cells have?” Tubbo continued.

A blank look washed over his roommate’s face. Tubbo knew this face far too well. It was the same face that he would give Tubbo whenever Tubbo described what he did in the lab or whenever he showed him an article with more than 100 words.

Tommy then furrowed his eyebrows before attempting to ask, “Don’t you mean orgas—”

“No,” Tubbo cut him off, rolling his eyes. “You’re fucking gross. Organelles are like the organs of a cell.”

“*Sorry* for wanting clarification!” Tommy huffed as he slumped into his chair. “I don’t know. They have like a powerhouse or something, right?”

“Yes, they have mitochondria.”

“Mitochondria? More like you ‘mitochon’ deez—”

“If you finish that sentence I will purposely teach you incorrect information,” Tubbo interrupted with a straight face.

“Boo, you’re no fun. I hate learning things,” Tommy whined.

“Well, that’s not a sentence I enjoy hearing from my students,” a deep voice remarked, making the two boys jump.

The two of them whipped their heads toward the end of the table to find a tall, dark-haired person. They wore black-tinted glasses and a maroon suit jacket with a matching tie. An air of imitation pushed across the table and both the boys immediately sat up straight in their chairs.

“Oh hello, Headmaster Eret! We were just joking around!” Tommy awkwardly greeted.

“Yeah! We promise we’re studying very hard!” Tubbo agreed, forcing a smile on his face and trying to keep himself from glancing at his roommate. Tubbo had no desire to piss off the person who held his scholarship in their hands.

The headmaster let out a laugh. “Don’t worry boys, I know you two work very hard. Especially with what happened recently, I am proud of you two for keeping up with your studies.”

“Thank you,” they answered together.

Not that we had a choice, Tubbo thought. *If we didn’t, our scholarships would be revoked.*

It was unheard of for students at Visions to be excused from normal tests so when Tubbo received the message that *neither* of them had to even take their exams, he was so surprised that read the message at least 10 times. He then sent a message back asking if they were being serious. Just in case.

A school caring about its students? Who knew it was possible? Definitely not Tubbo.

“I would love to chat, but I actually have something to discuss with you, Thomas,” the headmaster said as he directed his attention at the blonde. “Privately.”

“Um, okay,” Tommy slowly stood up as he gave Tubbo a confused glance.

Tubbo wordlessly shrugged. He had no idea what the headmaster could want with Tommy. The two of them had already been interviewed extensively by the police about Tommy's incident. They stuck with the story that Tommy had been jumped by a gang of criminals as he was walking back to campus. Tommy made sure to include the fact that he tried his hardest to fight back and that he was extremely manly and strong even though he lost.

He watched his roommate and the headmaster walk behind the bookshelves and disappear from his sight. Tubbo sighed and began to flip through the textbook again, looking at topics that he could quiz Tommy on.

His best friend was still struggling with a majority of the material in the class, but Tubbo wasn't surprised. It was a hard class. He would be struggling too if not for the fact that he worked in a lab every day where he discussed how cells reacted to different stimuli. He leaned his head on his hand as he turned to a page filled with the multicolored shapes of organelles. Tubbo knew there was no easy method of remembering all this material besides memorization and he knew his roommate better than anyone else. Memorization was not his forte.

Tubbo began to fiddle with the thin textbook pages. Memorization may not be Tommy's strong skill, but Tubbo knew he could get the job done. His roommate was one of the most talented people he knew. His friend would never admit it aloud, but he worked his ass off to get into Visions just like Tubbo. He deserved to be here, even if he acted like he was here because of a lottery pick. Whenever he did something, he always gave 110%. He would pour his whole soul into it.

That's why Tubbo was so confused when Tommy said he didn't want to be Vigilante anymore. Tubbo had witnessed firsthand how excited Tommy was whenever he put on that red hoodie. It was like a spark lighting a fire; a fire Tubbo hadn't seen for a while.

Tommy was a completely different person from half a year ago when he worked from Dream. Even though he was working deep into the night as Vigilante, Tommy never seemed as tired as he did when he worked with the Number One Hero. Tubbo barely even saw Tommy during those months and whenever he did Tommy was too tired to even have a full conversation. Tubbo wasn't even sure what a hero's assistant did until he met Ranboo.

He sighed as he pulled notecards out of his backpack. Tubbo appreciated that Tommy was being responsible for his health, but it was still odd that he was swearing off the activity. On the other hand, after Tommy had described what happened the night he had found his roommate lying in a dirty alleyway covered in blood, Tubbo understood why he had decided to step back. He wouldn't want to deal with murderous villains and weird disembodied voices plaguing his dreams either.

But that was the thing, wasn't it? Tubbo wouldn't dare to take fighting lessons from criminals or go face-to-face with heroes. He wouldn't think to slap on a mask and go fight crime himself. If Tubbo was to break the law, he would be secretive about it, no need for a whole show and no chance of being caught. However, Tommy wasn't Tubbo. Tommy was loud and careless and wouldn't hesitate to take anyone on in a fight. Tommy didn't step back. He pushed forward no matter what stood in his way.

So what was making him hesitate now?

“Hey,” Tommy's voice snapped Tubbo back to the library.

“Welcome back,” Tubbo smiled as he watched his friend slide back into his seat. “Is everything okay?”

Tommy fidgeted with the corners of his notebook, clearly avoiding eye contact. “They told me that Mr. Soot is taking a leave of absence, indefinitely. They don’t know when he’ll be back.”

“Oh, that sucks. I liked Mr. Soot. He was actually one of the good teachers around here.”

“Yeah, he was. But that wasn’t the reason Eret needed to talk to me,” Tommy’s head dropped, and let a beat pass before continuing, “Apparently when Mr. Soot came in to turn in his forms, he also told Headmaster Eret that the bookstore was going to be closing for a few months. Something about renovations or whatnot.”

And then Tommy let out a deep sigh, “Anyways, he basically told them that I was fired.”

“What the hell? They didn’t even have the courtesy to call you first?” Tubbo asked in disbelief.

Tommy shook his head and Tubbo muttered, “That’s fucked up.”

“Yeah it was pretty shitty, but luckily Headmaster Eret is giving me until the next semester a new job. Maybe this time I can work with people who don’t randomly ghost me,” Tommy replied bitterly.

Tubbo lightly nudged Tommy with his shoulder. “Hey, I can always ask Sam if there are any janitor positions open at the lab.”

“You know, custodial staffs are the backbone of society.” Tommy glanced up with a soft smile, but his eyes quickly went back to focusing on the textbook.

Tubbo stared at the notecards deeply as silence fell between the roommates. What kind of sick joke were Mr. Soot and his family pulling? He had seen the disappointment on Tommy’s face when he received the message that the bookstore’s voicemail box was full. Tubbo didn’t need to be Tommy’s best friend to understand that he was hurt. And he wasn’t just talking about the last of Tommy’s bruises and scrapes.

“So what’s next on the agenda, Tubzo?” Tommy asked, breaking the quiet. His gaze landed on the cards in Tubbo’s hands and groaned, “Please don’t tell me we’re making flashcards.”

“Nope!” Tubbo answered as he shoved the flashcards back into his bag.

“Wait, really?”

“Yep!” Tubbo pushed his chair out and rose to his feet. “No more learning. I think we’re in need of various baked goods from Niki’s.”

Tommy slammed his textbook closed and jumped up with a smile. “Yes! No more learning!” he exclaimed loudly.

“Shut the fuck up,” Tubbo hushed him, resisting the urge to laugh. That was the Tommy he knew. “We’re still in the school library, dumbass.”

Tommy hunched closer to his roommate and whispered, “No more learning. Yay.”

—

The bright sun made Tubbo blink rapidly as they climbed the stairs out of the subway station. Even with the sunny sky, the winter chill threaded through his coat. Tubbo rubbed his hands together trying to conserve the little warmth left in his fingers. He looked over to his friend next to him, his hands shoved in his jacket pockets.

His bandages had only come off a few days ago. Tubbo knew Tommy was pretty durable but the fact that Tommy still had functioning hands after the fight was no short of a miracle. His roommate had told him how Shockwave had offered to help right after the fight, but it quickly no longer became an option after he revealed that he knew Tommy’s identity.

Tubbo brought his hands to his mouth and breathed hot air onto them. Tommy never fully explained why he wanted to stop being Vigilante, but it was clear that Tommy was still reeling from Shockwave’s revelation. Along with his near-death experience, it was clear why Tommy had no desire to continue his vigilante hobby.

Tubbo had tried to explain to Tommy that since Shockwave hadn’t seen his face there was no way Shockwave could confirm his claims, but Tommy wasn’t interested in the conversation. He had set his foot down.

“What about the people of Logstedshire?” Tubbo had asked. “What will happen to the people you help?”

“There are tons of other heroes,” Tommy answered solemnly. “They’ll be fine without Vigilante.”

The worst part about all of Tommy’s answers to his various questions for the past few days was that they made sense. Tommy was acting responsibly and logically. He was thinking about the consequences of his actions.

And it was really fucking weird. Tubbo was concerned that maybe Tommy hadn’t fully recovered from his concussion.

“Do you think Niki is still selling pumpkin spice lattes?” His roommate asked as they made their way down the sidewalk.

“Last time I went she said they were about to switch to their winter drinks. She might still be selling pumpkin muffins though,” Tubbo replied.

“Aw man,” Tommy grumbled. “I was really hoping to get one.”

“Wait, didn’t you get a pumpkin spice latte last year and hate it?” Tubbo raised his eyebrow.

“I wanted to try again! The ladies love men who embrace their inner pumpkin spice addiction!”

“I think you should care a little less about ladies and focus on controlling your caffeine addiction.”

Tommy gasped dramatically. “I cannot believe you would say that I should care *LESS* about ladies! I love women and respecting them!”

“When’s the last time you even talked to a woman?”

“I talk to women all the time! And I always speak to them about various topics! I pass the Bechdel test every single time.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “You’re not included in the Bechdel test, Tommy. You’re a dude.”

“You’re just jealous that I am such an amazing feminist,” Tommy crossed his arms. “But I do know a way for you to become a good feminist like me.”

“Oh really? Please enlighten me on how I can help women as you do.”

“You can support a small woman-owned business like Niki’s bakery by paying for my order.”

“I’m not paying for you!” Tubbo replied with a look of disbelief. “Support Niki on your own!”

“But Tubbo! I’m jobless now! I have no money!” his caffeine-deprived roommate pleaded.

“You have plenty of money,” Tubbo pointed out, ignoring Tommy’s puppy eyes. “You’re just being need–”

Suddenly someone bumped into his shoulder and a dozen papers scattered to the ground.

“Oh Prime, I am sorry!” Tubbo immediately apologized as he kneeled down to start picking up the papers.

“No, it’s my fault! I was not watching where I was going,” a familiar voice replied. Tubbo looked up and found himself looking at a young woman. Her brown hair was pulled up into a ponytail with wisps of her bangs framing her face and she wore a long maroon coat that matched her gloves.

“Oh, hi Hannah! Funny running into you here, *literally*,” Tubbo joked as he handed her a few of the papers she had dropped.

The front desk attendant of Pandora Labs laughed. “Hi Tubbo! Sorry about crashing into you though.”

“Seriously, it’s no problem,” he picked up a few more of the scattered pages. The papers were a red flyer promoting an open house for something called ‘The Crimson.’ He didn’t recognize the name from anywhere, but apparently, it was something Hannah was into since she had more than 40 flyers.

“If you’re considering putting these up as posters for your bedroom, I will admit it’s going to be a little repetitive,” Tommy commented as he handed the last of his papers to Hannah.

“I don’t know, I think the red would work well as a wallpaper,” Tubbo continued the bit as he also handed his papers to her.

“You guys are funny,” Hannah softly chuckled. “I’m just helping promote an event for this group I’m a part of. We are trying to make the city a safer place for everyone by providing an accepting and caring community for like-minded individuals. We help people who feel lost and are looking for a place to belong.”

“It’s nice to see people working towards making our city better,” Tommy remarked. “It seems like everyone is so focused on heroes that they forget ordinary people can do good things too.”

“I totally agree with you... I’m sorry I don’t think I caught your name?” Hannah asked, directing her attention to Tommy.

“Oh, hi! I’m Tubbo’s roommate, Tommy!” He said as he shook her hand.

“Nice to meet you, Tubbo’s roommate, Tommy,” Hannah smiled. “I’m Tubbo’s coworker, Hannah.”

“Isn’t it so amazing that we both get to know an incredible person like Tubbo?” Tommy smirked as he nudged his friend.

Hannah nodded with a soft smile. “I agree, he is pretty cool. I think he’s the youngest person to ever work at Pandora Labs,”

“Alright, there’s no need for that,” Tubbo felt his face warm up. “This bit is weird.”

“Who said this was a bit?” Tommy asked as his evil smile grew bigger.

Hannah, on the other hand, laughed. “Well, it was so nice seeing you, Tubbo and it was nice meeting you, Tommy,” She then held out a flyer. “You guys should check The Crimson out. We need more people like you two.”

Tubbo and Tommy gave her polite smiles and took the papers before waving goodbye.

“Are you actually going to go to that?” Tommy asked as they started to walk towards the bakery again.

“It seems like a good event, but even if I was interested I don’t think I would have time to go. I already told Sam I’d be back in the lab tomorrow.” Tubbo said as he folded the paper and slipped it into a nearby recycling bin. “You seemed pretty interested in the fact that they help people. Are you going to go?”

“Nah, it’s on the other side of town. I’m too lazy,” Tommy replied flatly as he shoved his paper into his pocket.

“You’re not going to a meeting where they are going to discuss how to help people just because it’s too far away?” Tubbo wondered silently how this man ever was a vigilante.

“Yep,” Tommy confirmed. “I also don’t like working in groups. I’m more of an independent worker.”

“Independent, you say?” Tubbo replied as a sly smile formed on his face. “Then you won’t have any problem paying for your order at Niki’s.”

“That’s not fair, Tubbo! I’m jobless!”

“Here are your coffees and food,” The man with a shaved head and dual-colored glasses said emotionlessly as he set two cups and a paper bag on the counter.

Tommy snatched one of the cups and the bag of food and exclaimed, “Thanks, Jack!”

Tubbo took the remaining and also thanked the cashier (who looked a bit confused) before heading to the table his roommate had secured.

“This is the only time I am funding your expensive coffee shop orders,” Tubbo stated flatly as he sat down.

“I’ll take what I can get,” Tommy replied before taking a big gulp of his pumpkin spice latte (Niki had found the last of the ingredients in the back). A disgusted look spread across his face as he shook his head trying to get rid of the taste.

“I told you that you didn’t like pumpkin spice lattes,” Tubbo said matter-factly as he sipped his tea.

“There’s no harm in trying new things, Tubbo!” Tommy countered before taking another gulp of the drink (that he clearly did not like) again.

Tubbo let out a disappointed sigh before asking, “How did you know the cashier? I think this is the first time I’ve seen him here.”

“Last time I went on patrol before I heard you— erm—” Tommy cleared his throat loudly before continuing with a smile, “Sorry, the pumpkin spice is a lot. The last time I went on patrol before I got into ‘the fight’, I tried to arrest him because I thought he was breaking into the bakery. But in reality, he was just taking out the trash.”

“Well, I’m glad you didn’t. He seems nice,” Tubbo said, ignoring Tommy’s weirdly timed throat spasm.

“Me too, but I will admit he still has a pretty punchable face.”

“Still?”

“Did I not mention that this is the guy who robbed the bakery when I used my powers in public for the first time?”

Tubbo leaned in to whisper. “This is the laser eye guy? Seriously?”

“I know right? He looks so normal.”

Tubbo glanced back to watch the ex-criminal-turned-cashier wipe the counter with a rag. He quickly turned back, “Do you think he can bake cookies with his lasers?”

“No way! But I bet he can warm up the coffee with them though.”

“If he can warm up coffee then he could definitely bake cookies!”

“He would burn a hole into the dough!”

“With that logic, he would just burn a hole in the coffee cup!”

“Not if he was warming up a whole barrel of coffee!” Tommy argued, not letting up.

“Do you think that they just make coffee in barrels?” Tubbo raised his eyebrow.

“I’m not a coffee maker! I don’t know!” Tommy shrugged.

“I’m pretty sure—” Tubbo was cut off by buzzing coming from his pocket.

He pulled out his phone and saw that it was a call from the laboratories. Weird, he was supposed to be off today.

“Sorry,” Tubbo apologized. “It’s work. I’ll be right back.”

“It’s okay!” Tommy replied before taking another sip of his drink with a disgusted face.

Tubbo shook his head at his friend’s stupidity and then slid out of the bakery. He picked up the call and stated, “This is Tubbo Underscore speaking.”

A friendly voice came through the line, *“Hello Tubbo! This is Shadow! You know, the hero that controls shadows?”*

Of course, Tubbo knew the Number Five Hero of L’Manburg. Sam had introduced him to Tubbo briefly a few weeks ago when he had visited Pandora. Last time Tubbo checked, the hero had been visiting the lab pretty often (along with muffins and other baked goods), but Shadow hadn’t really talked to him since he was just a barely paid intern.

Tubbo immediately stood a bit straighter, even though he was on a call. “Hi, Shadow! I definitely know who you are! I really appreciate your call and everything but I have to ask um... why are you calling me?”

“I’m going to be honest, Tubbo. You see, I have a slight problem.”

Tubbo furrowed his eyebrows. “Is everything okay at the lab?”

“Yes! It’s nothing bad has happened at the lab. The issue is that I just back from patrol with a brand-new specimen. It’s fresh right now and I would like to get it examined as soon as possible. However, I recently just was informed that Sam was called out of town for business and he’s not here right now.”

That was news to Tubbo. He had just talked to Sam earlier today about coming back to work tomorrow. He hadn’t mentioned anything about being away from the lab.

Shadow continued, *“But then I remembered Sam’s praises of your work with examining and identifying substances! So I was wondering if you were able to come in and help me out?”*

Tubbo’s heart leaped into his throat. He was going to be able to directly help a hero with a new project! With a brand new specimen! And the hero specifically asked for him! Him! Tubbo!

“You still there, Tubbo?” Shadow asked.

His voice pulled Tubbo away from his thoughts and blurted out, “Yes! Sorry! I can totally come and help you!”

Shadow let out a relieved sigh. *“You’re a lifesaver. Thank you, I’ll see you in a little bit.”*

“Thank you for the opportunity! I’ll see you soon too!” Tubbo excitedly replied before hearing the click of the call ending.

Tubbo stared at his phone in shock. A hero had just asked for his help! And not just any hero! The Number Five Hero of L’Manburg! And he was going to be able to work with him... in a little bit.

Shit.

Shadow wanted Tubbo to come to the lab right now... Just as Tubbo was currently supposed to be hanging out with his best friend who just got fired from his job.

Shit, indeed.

Tubbo dragged his hand over his face before awkwardly entering the shop again.

“Hey Boss Man!” Tommy greeted as he walked over. “I was thinking about it, and I just think that Jack should refrain from shooting his laser eyes at anything. I’m pretty sure anything he hits simply explodes.”

“Wha— you what that’s a good point, Tommy,” Tubbo conceded. He didn’t really have time to argue with him anymore. “I’m really sorry about this, but I just called into the lab.”

Confusion passed over his roommate’s face. “Isn’t it your day off?”

Tubbo’s chest tightened. Tommy was going to feel awful that Tubbo was leaving him. What if he hated him for it? What if he cut off Tubbo again? He couldn’t do that again. The week where they didn’t speak had been torture.

He had never felt resentment like that before. His mind felt like it was splitting in half all week long. He could barely focus on any of his work because of it. The anger burned so strong that when Tubbo had picked up Tommy’s call that night he hadn’t even realized Tommy was injured at first.

Tommy was bleeding out in a random street and Tubbo had been reluctant to even pick up the call. He almost let his friend die because he was mad for some stupid reason. The thought made Tubbo sick.

He never wanted to feel like that again. Nothing was worth feeling like that. Not even the opportunity to work with a hero.

Tubbo’s eyes fell to the floor as words began to tumble out. “It is! And I know we’re supposed to be hanging out and I don’t want to leave you alone, especially when you just got screwed over by your job! I am so sorry, I want to hang out with you, but this is a really cool opportunity and I don’t get a lot of chances like this and when I accepted I kind of forgot we were hanging out and I just said ‘yes’ without thinking how it affects you. You know what? I’m actually going to just call Shadow back and cancel—”

“Woah! Tubbo!” his roommate interrupted. Tubbo lifted his head to find his best friend smiling. “Don’t cancel anything! Go to work, I don’t mind.”

It was now Tubbo’s turn to be confused. “Really? You’re not mad?”

“Why would I be mad that you have an opportunity to work with Shadow? I’m honestly surprised that Shadow hasn’t been asking you to work with him more often. You’re the smartest person I know.”

Tubbo’s chest relaxed and he let out a sigh of relief. “Thanks, Tommy. I’ll make it up to you, I swear.”

“Will you buy me another pumpkin spice latte?” Tommy asked as Tubbo grabbed his tea off the table.

“I will buy you any coffee you want *except* a pumpkin spice latte.”

Tubbo could hear his roommate's loud groans even as he left the bakery.

The automated female voice rang through the air as he stepped off the subway. As he climbed the stairs out of the underground, he found himself walking against the crowd. It seemed like most people were heading home for the day.

He stepped into the open air and frowned. The sun was low in the sky, making it glow golden. As much as he enjoyed not sweating the moment he stepped outside, the short winter days were not a plus in Tubbo's books. He never enjoyed the early darkness.

He headed down the street before stopping at the crosswalk. He tapped his food while waiting for the walking signal when something red caught the corner of his eye. He turned his head to find a pole covered in dozens of posters and flyers of various events and programs. However, the one that had his attention was one he had seen before. It was one of the flyers Hannah had earlier. It read:

Do You Feel Lost? Do You Want To Be Heard? Do You Want A Place To Belong?

THE CRIMSON

Is The Place For YOU.

We Are A Peaceful Community Working To Bring L'Manburg Together

All Are Welcome

Join Us At...

Even after reading the poster, Tubbo was honestly still confused *what* the group did. Hannah had been very vague when describing it too. A strong breeze made Tubbo shiver in his jacket. Then again he didn't really mind what people were doing if it wasn't hurting anyone. He turned away from the flyer as the walking signal popped up and made his way across the street.

Suddenly he felt his phone vibrate in his pocket.

He pulled it out and answered enthusiastically, "Hey Boo-Boy!"

"Please tell me that nickname is a one-time thing," Ranboo's voice sounded disappointed.

"I think it rolls off the tongue pretty well," Tubbo pointed out.

"I just don't want Tommy to hear it. He's already tried out every other nickname possible besides my actual name."

“Hey, at least he’s talking to you without grimacing the whole time!”

“True. I think he even made eye contact with me last time we spoke.”

“Look at that! Improvement!” Tubbo laughed. “Why’d you call me anyway?”

“Oh yeah, I just was wondering when you were coming back to the dorm. I needed some help studying biology and physics.”

“You’re back at the dorm so soon? Didn’t you mention that you had a late night again?”

“Dream let me leave early due to exams, but he did mention that we would be double training this weekend though,” Ranboo admitted sadly.

“Oh come on, don’t be so sad about that. You *love* training,” Tubbo lowered his voice to a whisper, “don’t you, *Ender?* ”

“SHH! Tubbo!” Ranboo hissed into the phone. *“Aren’t you public?!”*

Tubbo glanced at his surroundings, seeing that the sidewalk was pretty much empty. “Chill L’Manburg’s favorite side-kick, no one is even near me. Most people have headed out of the city for the night.”

It hadn’t been difficult for Tubbo to find out the secret part of Ranboo’s job as Dream’s assistant. Tubbo had noticed the way Ranboo avoided talking about Ender for a while, but he had brushed it off as Ranboo being secretive about his job or something.

However, the real revelation came when Tubbo accidentally scared Ranboo and Ranboo proceeded to teleport in a flurry of purple particles across their room. Connecting the dots after that didn’t take much.

Tubbo heard Ranboo sigh softly on the other side of the line before asking, *“Are you on your way back to campus?”*

“Nah, I got called into the lab.”

“I thought you were going back to work tomorrow?”

“Apparently Sam is out of town today so Shadow called me to come in to help him out. Something about examining a new specimen he found?”

“He asked you personally? That’s so cool, man! I know Shadow has been working pretty hard on a personal project so I haven’t seen him around headquarters. I tried asking Dream about what he was doing, but Dream didn’t have a clue either.”

“Oh shit, do you think it’s a secret project or something? Am I supposed to be even talking about it?” Tubbo felt his eyebrows scrunch in worry.

“If Shadow didn’t mention anything about confidentiality, I bet you’re fine. Heroes like being vague and mysterious for no reason sometimes. I would know, my boss is the master at being

vague and mysterious.”

“I don’t know,” Tubbo countered. “I feel like Dream’s sidekick is giving him a run for his money.”

“You’re the worst. At this rate, you’re going to expose my secret identity.”

“Don’t tempt me! I’m not afraid of your tallness!”

“I’m doomed. It’s over for me,” Ranboo resigned, not even giving a fight. He had the backbone of a chocolate eclair.

“Don’t worry, Boo-Boy. Today I am merciful. Your secret is safe with me for now.”

“Wow, I’m so grateful,” Ranboo’s voice was dripping in sarcasm. *“Since you’re so good at keeping secrets.”*

Now, Ranboo wasn’t wrong about that one. Tubbo was very good at keeping secrets.

“Your very welcome,” Tubbo smirked as he walked up to the door of Pandora. “As much I’d love to continue to hear you compliment my exceptional secret-keeping skills, we will have to continue this at a later date.”

“Psh, sure Tubbo. See ya soon.”

“I’ll probably be back late so don’t wait on me to have dinner! Also, make sure Tommy eats something besides pizza! Please! Thanks! Bye!”

“Wait, why do I—” Ranboo was cut off by Tubbo hanging up the call. Ranboo could figure out how to combat Tommy’s eating habits. Probably.

He pushed open the frosted glass door to see Hannah sitting at the front desk, typing away on the computer.

“Hey, Hannah!” Tubbo greeted as he pulled out his identification card.

She looked up with a surprised smile. “I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon again! What are you doing here?”

“Shadow asked me to come in,” Tubbo held out the card and Hannah took it and scanned it.

“Oh, I just saw him! I think he mentioned that he was going to the labs on the fourth floor,” she said as he handed the card back.

“Cool! Thanks for letting me know!”

They waved each other goodbye before Tubbo headed towards the elevator. He felt his stomach twist into a knot as he stepped onto the lift and tapped the button to the fourth floor. It wasn’t that Tubbo didn’t know what he was doing, but the fact that this was the first time he would be collecting data without the guidance of Sam or another researcher.

What if he gave Shadow incorrect data? What if he accidentally broke something? He had used these machines dozens of times, but that didn't matter. He could still mess something up and ruin everything. He'd embarrass himself in front of a hero and he would get fired. If he ruined something here at the city's best research facility there would be no way he would get hired anywhere else. He would be blacklisted from getting another job. And if he lost his job he would lose his scholarship. If he lost his job here he wouldn't be able to help Tommy get a job here either and they would both be jobless and get kicked out and then they would be stuck back into the system and then they would never see each—

Tubbo let out a deep breath. He needed to calm down. If he wanted to analyze the specimen accurately, he needed a clear head. As much as a clear head he could have with the throbbing headache that had formed at the base of his skull.

The elevator let out a soft *ding* as he stepped out into the corridor. Immediately wall of cold air slapped him in the face. That was one way to wake up a guy. The fourth floor was home to the research of biological substances so it wasn't surprising that the floor was colder than others, but this cold was unfamiliar to the young intern. Maybe someone had left a window open.

"Hello, Tubbo!" A voice came from his right.

Tubbo jumped at the sudden greeting and spun to see a tall man with a long black coat with red detailing. Next to him was another man who was slightly shorter with cat-like features and wore dark-colored combat gear.

"Oh! I am so sorry for scaring you! We were just waiting for you," the man with the coat apologized with a smile.

"You're fine, Mr. Shadow! Don't worry," Tubbo replied.

"I hope it's okay, but I also brought Cat. He was with me during the patrol where we picked up the specimen," Shadow stated, gesturing to the man next to him.

"It's no problem at all! I'm happy to help you guys in any way I can!"

"You're a good kid, Tubbo. We put the specimen in the lab right over here," Shadow said before turning and leading them to the open door behind the two heroes.

A shiver went down Tubbo's spine the moment he stepped into the room. He ignored it though as his eyes landed on the specimen Shadow had been talking about.

In the middle of the lab sat a giant hunk of a thick twisted plant vine with a few leaves sticking out in various spots. It looked as if multiple small vines had braided together to create this goliath of a vine. However, the thing that caught Tubbo's attention was the color.

It was bright red.

"We found it growing underneath some of the abandoned buildings near the Badlands," Shadow spoke next to him. "I've never seen anything like it."

“Me neither,” Cat added.

That would make Tubbo third.

“I can take a sample and cross-reference it with our database and see if any matches come up?” Tubbo offered as he stepped to a cabinet and pulled out gloves, safety glasses, and some tools. “It probably is some sort of hybrid that came from crossbreeding at the local farms.”

“Or it could be something brand new,” Shadow commented.

“Maybe,” Tubbo shrugged as he walked closer to the red plant. He carefully took one of the scalpels and cut off 2 thin slices of it before placing them onto separate glass plates.

“I’m going to place one of them in here,” Tubbo gestured to the small grey device that was connected to the computer, “this will give us some basic information about the specimen, and the computer will automatically compare its analysis with our database.”

Tubbo slid one of the glass plates into the device before turning towards a microscope with the other. “While the computer does its thing, I’ll just take a look to see if I recognize anything off the top of my mind.”

“That sounds perfect, Tubbo. Do whatever you need,” Shadow replied. “We trust your findings.”

“Oh, um, I-,” Tubbo stuttered, “I’m just an intern so it’s probably best to have Sam double-check my data.”

Shadow shook his head. “Don’t sell yourself short, you are a bright young man.”

“Um, thank you, sir,” Tubbo said sheepishly as he threw away his gloves. He then leaned forward into the eyepiece of the microscope and began adjusting the lens.

The three of them sat in silence for a bit as the young intern examined the red plant. At first glance, there was nothing too interesting about the cells besides the fact they were an unnatural color of red. They had all the normal attributes of a cell plant, including chloroplasts (which usually were only found in green tissue).

“So Tubbo, how is school going?” Shadow asked, breaking the silence.

Tubbo glanced up with a confused look but answered, “It’s good. I’ve been recently just catching up on homework and stuff.”

“That’s good. I’m glad to hear that you’re working hard.”

Tubbo smiled awkwardly before looking into the microscope again. This time he zoomed closer into the outer layer and noticed its bumpy-like texture. Weird. He’s never seen a plant with tissue like this.

“School can be so difficult nowadays. I bet he doesn’t have any time to even socialize,” Cat suddenly spoke out.

“Oh, you’re right, Cat.” Shadow agreed. “Tubbo, is this true? Do you have time to be with your friends?”

When did heroes become so talkative? Tubbo thought.

He looked up again with a polite smile. “I make time to be with them. I try my best to balance my school, work, and social lives.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It’s good to have friends,” Shadow went on.

Tubbo nodded before looking into the eyepiece again. He felt bad not continuing the conversation with the heroes, but he really needed to focus on figuring out what kind of plant this was. He set his attention on the outer tissue again.

However, he needed to keep readjusting the lens because he couldn’t get a good look at the bumps. It was like they kept on moving.

Tubbo breath stopped in his throat.

The bumps *were* moving. *They were spreading.*

“Could you tell us about your friends?”

The intern jumped as the voice came from directly next to him. He twisted to find the cloaked hero standing beside him. *How the hell did Shadow move that fast?*

Confusion washed over him as he processed the question. “Uh, what?”

“I was just asking if you could tell us about your friends,” Shadow smiled.

Suddenly the computer behind him beeped loudly. The analysis of the plant had finished. The throbbing of his headache had become a full-blown headache now. There were far too many things happening right now.

Tubbo gave a strained smile back. “Sorry, just give me a second. I’m going to quickly check the results of the computer,” he said as he took a few steps backward.

“Oh go ahead, I can’t wait to see what it says about our new findings.”

Tubbo tensed his shoulders to keep himself from shivering. Why the fuck was it so cold in here? He then quickly clicked open the test results. And his heart dropped.

The computer read:

CONTINUE TESTS WITH CAUTION

NEUROTOXIC SPORES DETECTED

Tubbo spun around and blurted, “This thing may be dangerous! We need to contain this specimen immed—”

Shadow interrupted him, “Tubbo, calm down. It’s okay, it’s just a plant.”

“No, you see the plant can release toxic spores. We need to—”

Shadow took a step towards Tubbo. “Why don’t you tell us about your friends instead?”

“What?” Tubbo’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Why wasn’t Shadow taking this seriously? He glanced over to Cat and who was also weirdly calm. Tubbo’s stomach flipped. Something about all of this was wrong.

“I see. You’re confused about what friend we want you to tell us about. Is that it?” Shadow cocked his head to the side. He was now less than a foot away from the intern.

Tubbo clenched his jaw to keep his teeth from chattering. “I have no idea what you’re talking about, sir.”

“We would love to know more about your friend, *Tommy*. ”

The sweat on his back felt like it turned to ice.

What the hell did Tommy have to do with any of this? How did Shadow or Cat even know Tommy was his friend? When had he even started sweating? And why was it *so fucking cold in this room?*

Tubbo racked his aching brain for an answer before choking out, “I– I don’t know a Tommy, sir.”

Shadow let out a chilling laugh.

And suddenly, his voice lost all friendliness, “Now we both know that’s not true.”

“I’m serious!” Tubbo scrambled back but felt the computer screen on his back, “I don’t have a friend named Tommy!”

“Tubbo,” Cat’s voice made him snap his head towards the door. The hero was blocking his only exit now. “Please do not make this difficult. The Egg does not like disobedience.”

The Egg? The same Egg that tried to kidnap Tommy a few weeks ago? But that couldn’t be it. Tommy said that the guy who tried to kidnap him had red eyes. And Shadow and Cat didn’t have...

Tubbo looked up to find Shadow standing directly in front of him. He froze.

The hero’s eyes glowed red.

Without another thought, Tubbo grabbed the closest thing to his hands and slammed it into the shadow hero’s head.

The grey device crumbled as the hero yelped and stumbled back in pain. Tubbo pushed him back and grabbed the microscope. He immediately spun around and chucked the machine at the cat hero who had started to run at him.

Cat swiftly jumped onto a nearby table to dodge the machine, leaving the dorm wide open. Tubbo sprinted out the door, ignoring the shouts behind him.

He passed the elevators and swung open the door to the stairwell. He wasn't going to risk getting stuck in a metal box when he had two heroes chasing him.

Thousands of questions buzzed around his head, making his headache even worse. Why the fuck did the Egg need Tommy so badly? And what the fuck did Tubbo have to do with that?

He ran as fast as he could down the stairs, bursting out into an empty lobby. He gasped for air as he whipped his head around, looking for the exit. Then from the corner of his eye, he saw Hannah staring at him with wide eyes.

"Hannah!" Tubbo shouted as he rushed towards the desk. "We need to get out of here! Shadow and Cat, there's something wrong with them! I don't know what's going on, but they started acting really weird, and I—"

"Tubbo! Slow down!" Hannah interrupted, worry filling her face. "What happened? You're bleeding!"

She gestured to his hand. He must have injured himself when he smashed the device in Shadow's face, but that didn't matter right now.

"I'm fine!" he answered, his breathing still fast. "But we need to get out of here and get help! Please! Something is wrong with Shadow and Cat, but I'll explain everything after we leave!"

Hannah softly sighed before saying, "Okay, Tubbo, but let me just grab my stuff."

Tubbo nodded before glancing back at the elevators. Even though he had left the fourth floor, he was still shivering.

"Tubbo?" Hannah called behind him.

Tubbo turned around. "Yeah, Hannah? What's—"

PSSST

A mist suddenly filled his mouth and nose. His throat immediately began to burn and Tubbo fell to his knees, coughing. He tried looking up, but his eyes were blurry.

"Don't resist it, it'll be more painful then," Hannah's voice was cold.

Tubbo attempted to choke out a response, but he could barely breathe. He felt like something was covering the inside of his throat. Something was invading his body, his mind.

“This is an honor, Tubbo. Do not be scared,” Hannah's voice was distant now.

He gripped his hair as he pressed his forehead into the floor. His head felt like it was splitting in half.

XKS DTUA RDA DKJKP KB CSEYEJC SQ RK RDA GAX.

And his vision went red.

Chapter End Notes

whoops... my hand slipped O.o

also for all my decoders... you'll need a key :)

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

Twitch: <https://www.twitch.tv/theuntitledartist>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWMvQYN0oRCzngU82UbQR4g>

The Untitled Discord: <https://discord.gg/RSh5SHs3MU>

Instagram: TheUntitledArtist

Twitter: TheUntitledArt

TikTok: TheUntitledArtist

Tumblr: The-Untitled-Artist

Rule #14: Green Couches are Ugly

Chapter Summary

Tommy has a few conversations. One about an ugly couch.

Chapter Notes

tw // fighting, mention of guns

Before you jump in I wanted to mention a few things that were on my mind!

1) Since Ranboo is in this chapter I wanted to clarify that I do know that they use he/they pronouns now! In this story, I have been mainly just sticking to using one set of pronouns for characters (like they/them for Aimsey and Eret) so for now, I'll be using he/him pronouns for Ranboo just for consistency but please do not interpret this as me ignoring his identity! I am very happy for them and I wish him the best :)

2) So I'm going to be completely honest with y'all that this chapter took a lot out of me. I know I have mentioned that I get writer's block pretty frequently but the honest truth is that I am just not a fast writer.

lol i could go on and on but TLDR: updates will probably be much slower than usual. I have tried to get out weekly updates but no joke that literally takes up all my free time. So I want to get back into art and streaming for a bit until I can get a bit of a rhythm going again! I promise I will still be on the internet creating content y'all might have to wait a bit before a new chapter lol

3) Thank you all so much for all the love and comments and feedback <3 No joke it brings me so much joy that y'all are enjoying the story and I am having a lot of fun sharing it with you <3

and finally

4) if you see any spelling mistakes,,, no you don't :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy checked his phone again. He let out a soft groan. Barely two minutes had passed since the last time he checked.

Studying biology had to be a new form of torture. Tommy rested his face on the open textbook. Maybe the knowledge would just seep into his brain if he stayed like this long

enough.

His usual tutor, Tubbo, was currently unavailable to help Tommy understand whatever the hell ATP synthase was. Tommy had fallen asleep before Tubbo even came back to the room last night, so Tommy decided that it was best to let him rest. Plus Tommy had no desire to have a sleep-derived tutor scolding him every time he misspelled chloroplast.

“Tommy?” his substitute tutor, Ranboo, asked from across the table.

“You broke him,” his other substitute tutor, Aimsey, followed up. “Your studying style is too weird, even for him.”

“Please don’t say that I have a studying style,” Ranboo requested, disgust filling his voice. “You’re making me seem like such a nerd.”

“That’s because you *are* a nerd,” Tommy added as he raised his head and slapped away the pages that slightly stuck to his forehead.

“It’s true, only a nerd can hold a job and get good grades. There’s been extensive research done,” Aimsey nodded in agreement.

“Aimsey, you literally have better grades than me,” Ranboo refuted.

“Hey, I never said I *wasn’t* a nerd either,” Aimsey shrugged. “You’re just more a nerd than me. Just look at your flashcards.”

“The colors help me organize them!” Ranboo defended, but he wasn’t very successful as Aimsey laughed in response.

Tommy opened his mouth to continue the bullying of his dual-colored-haired roommate, but instead, his stomach let out a loud growl. He glanced at his phone again and saw that the dining hall had just opened for lunch. Maybe a slice of pizza could cure his brain fog.

He began to pack up when Ranboo called out, “If you don’t like flashcards, we don’t have to use them. We can study a different way if you’d like?”

Tommy looked at him with wide eyes, remembering that he was currently studying with other people. “Oh, shit. Your flashcards are fine. I just was planning to go grab some lunch.”

“Oh, okay! See you later then,” Ranboo replied before going back to shuffling his rainbow-colored notecards.

An awkward silence fell between the trio. Tommy could easily thank the two of them for their help and go have lunch by himself. Just like how he had dinner by himself last night. Or how he looked for jobs by himself. Or how he spent most nights staring at the ceiling by himself.

“Would- would you like to come?” Tommy choked out.

What a wonderful start, he thought as he felt his shoulders loom near his ears.

He forced his shoulders to relax as Ranboo and Aimsey looked at him with surprised faces. This was a dumb idea. Maybe he could just go back to his dorm and see if Tubbo was awake. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to eat alone again. He could scroll through the endless number of news articles about how heroes are doing a fantastic job and there is no need for vigilantes because all vigilantes do is make a mess—

“I'm sorry, Tommy, but I actually needed to study a bit more before my French exam this afternoon, so I can't,” Aimsey replied.

Tommy twisted his fingers and broke eye contact with them. Regret stirred in his gut as he was about to answer; However, Ranboo's voice made him look up.

“I'll come with you, Tommy,” Ranboo smiled as he closed his books and shoved his notecards into his bag.

“Cool, cool, cool...” Tommy answered softly. He tried to suppress the surprise that had spread across his face. He quickly turned to Aimsey and said, “Good luck with your exam.”

“Thanks, Tommy!” they said before waving goodbye to Ranboo and Tommy.

The roommates exited the library and a chilly breeze immediately brushed passed them. The grey clouds hung low and hid the sun from brightening up the mid-December day. They walked through a sparsely populated campus since the winter holiday was the next week. The two of them trekked the path towards the dining hall, that familiar awkward silence finding itself between the two of them.

Thankfully, Ranboo broke it this time by asking, “Are you planning to go home for break?”

“No, I live here year-round,” Tommy replied stiffly. “I don't really have anywhere else to go.”

“Oh, shoot- I'm sorry- I didn't mean—” Ranboo stuttered.

A few weeks ago Tommy probably would have bitterly replied to his roommate's question, but now he had no reason to hold that anger. It was just as Mr. Soot guessed: Ranboo had just been aiming to be Tommy's friend.

He was a good listener and helped Tommy with his math homework. He was always mindful of his space in the dorm and didn't disturb the others when he needed to wake up earlier than everyone else. And after engaging in a few conversations with Ranboo, Tommy quickly realized that he was pretty nice.

The problem was that Tommy was painfully awkward at being nice back.

“It's okay. There's no way you could have known,” Tommy reassured him and continued the small talk. “What about you? Any plans?”

“Uh, not really... just work stuff,” Ranboo sheepishly replied.

However, in a few pleasant conversations the two of them have had, it was pretty clear that the topic of Ranboo's job was a sensitive one. Neither of them knew how to navigate the fact that Ranboo had basically replaced Tommy. They usually just tiptoed around the topic and quickly switched to a different one.

But for some reason today Tommy felt bold. Maybe it was because he was tired of asking Ranboo about how finals were or what his favorite color was. Maybe it was the fact they didn't have Tubbo here to navigate the conversation. Or maybe it was the fact that Tommy just wanted to learn more about his new ~~friend~~ roommate.

So he did something that surprised both of them. Tommy attempted to turn a new leaf.

"How's that going?" Tommy asked.

Ranboo glanced at him with a confused look. "Are you talking about my job or...?"

"Yeah, how's working with Dream going?" Tommy doubled down. He ignored the twist in his gut. No going back now.

His roommate's look quickly shifted to surprise. "Oh... it's good! Sometimes it's a lot of work, but I'm also learning a lot."

"Cool, cool..." Tommy trailed off.

"Yeah..." Ranboo replied.

The awkwardness was suffocating. He pulled at his bag straps as he racked his brain for ways to break free from it. It was so much easier to talk to Ranboo when there was a third party there with them. Most of the time it was Tubbo, but even Aimsey had made the conversations easier this morning. Tommy had spent so long pushing Ranboo away that his body naturally wanted to close off from any conversation.

Tommy clenched his jaw as another sharp breeze whipped through his jacket. Ranboo was probably just being polite accepting his invitation to lunch. Ranboo probably only accepted to tutor this morning because he pitied him. Tommy lost his chance to be friends with Ranboo long ago. Why was he fighting this useless battle?

He rubbed the scars on his palms with his thumb. This was just another mess he couldn't fix. Maybe it would be easier to let this go before he ruined the convenient peace the two of them had made. He was barely equipped to be Tubbo's friend, let alone build a new friendship with a guy that he had actively shoved away for months. It wasn't that Ranboo wasn't a good person; maybe Tommy just wasn't a good enough person to be friends with—

"Oh yeah! You reminded me!" Ranboo's voice snapped him away from his thoughts. "Blaze asked me about you the other day!"

Tommy almost stopped in his tracks. "Me? Why was he asking about me?"

"Yeah! He asked me about school and he remembered that you also went there! He was pretty surprised when I told him we were roommates," Ranboo answered. "Other than that I

told him, you were doing well!”

“I’m surprised that he actually remembered me.”

I wonder if anyone else has asked about me, Tommy silently thought. *Does Drea—*

“Lots of people remember you!” Ranboo pointed out. “The barista in the lobby called me your name for weeks before realizing that I was a different person.”

“How did they confuse us? We look nothing alike!”

“I was confused too, but I guess it doesn’t matter when you’re ordering the same thing over and over again,” Ranboo shrugged.

“A vanilla latte with five shots of espresso, right?” The words rolled off his tongue easily. Memories of standing in the queue before the sun had even risen lingered in his mind.

“Pretty much, but on bad days he gets—”

“Seven shots plus whipped cream,” Tommy finished. “Don’t worry, I still remember Dream’s stupid coffee orders. I also remember that you have to guess which one he wants, depending on his mood.”

Ranboo shook his head. “Oh man, I didn’t realize that when I started. I was so confused when he would throw away the drink after one sip on some days but chug the *same drink* on other days!”

“At one point I just started getting both and deciding which one to give him depending on how he greeted me,” Tommy admitted.

“Oh, dude! That is so smart. I wish I had thought of that!”

“Eh, not really. I just got tired of the moody bastard. But I didn’t really have a problem with the coffee that much. You know what I really hated? That super ugly neon green couch that Dream refused to get rid of,” An image of the bright lime leather couch came into his mind and made him frown in disgust.

“Oh, Prime! You hate that couch too?!” Ranboo exclaimed.

“Of course, I hate the couch! It was the worst piece of furniture I’ve ever seen and I once lived in a warehouse that my foster parents claimed was a house.”

“I thought I was the only one! Everyone acts like it’s the nicest couch, but it’s not just ugly! It’s also uncomfortable!”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Everyone just says that because they don’t want to piss off Dream. There apparently used to be a matching chair, but Blaze set it on fire. Even though he was doing a great service to humanity, Dream got pissed at him so now everyone just deals with the couch.”

“If only Blaze could have taken out the couch too, maybe we wouldn’t even need heroes,” Ranboo joked.

“Hey! Don’t say that,” Tommy said, trying to continue the bit, “you’ll end up without a job, just like me.”

Suddenly, Ranboo’s smile fell. “What do you mean? Don’t you have a job at the bookstore?”

Shit. He forgot that only Tubbo knew about the unfortunate news he received yesterday. Once again he felt his shoulders tense up.

He let out a humorless laugh. “I guess I forgot to mention that I got fired yesterday.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. That sucks,” Ranboo softly stated.

Tommy tried to push past the sense of awkwardness that had come back, but he was unsuccessful. He broke eye contact as regret slowly washed over his body.

When had he started feeling bad for making weird small talk? When had he started overthinking his actions? Quitting vigilantism was supposed to solve his problems. Even when focusing on making friendships, he was failing. He had barely passed his classes and now he didn’t even have a job to go to. Everything was supposed to go back to the way it was. It was supposed to be straightforward now. Simple. Black and white. Right and wrong.

So why do I still feel like this? Tommy thought as he stared intensely at the sidewalk.

However, Ranboo’s voice brought his eyes back up. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“What?” Tommy asked, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“Oh- I just- I was wondering if you wanted to talk about it? It just seemed like you actually liked working at the bookstore,” Ranboo gave him a sympathetic smile. “It’s okay if you don’t! We can talk about something else.”

Tommy opened his mouth to refuse the offer, but he stopped himself as he found himself rubbing the scars on his palms again.

Tommy had quickly suppressed the initial hurt of Phil, Techno, and Mr. Soot not visiting or calling after the accident. He didn’t care that three strangers hadn’t checked on him while he was recovering. He had been ignored many times over the years; he had survived the foster care system; he knew better than to get attached to people who were nice out of courtesy. He had swiftly pushed them out of his mind and focused on school. He ignored the way his chest ached.

So when Headmaster Eret told him that he was fired, Tommy wasn’t sad. He wasn’t even disappointed. He found it a bit annoying that he had to find a new job, but nothing else. He felt nothing towards his old coworkers. A few deep breaths and a drink of water would get rid of the feeling of knots in his stomach.

It was just a stupid bookstore job. He didn't even like reading! All he would do is man the register. So what if he missed the smell of paper? So what if he missed running his hand along the spines of books as he walked down the aisle? What if he missed Mr. Soot's soft humming as they reshelved books? So what if he missed asking Techno to read from the new book he was reading that day? So what if he missed the way Phil would show him the tools that he used to repair old books?

None of these things mattered because he didn't care. Tommy had nothing to talk about because he didn't feel a single thing about the bookstore or the people who worked there.

He barely even noticed the substitute teacher who sat in the English room.

The blonde roommate let out a sigh. "I think the worst part about this is that I don't even know why they fired me," he confessed.

"What did they do? Just close the door in your face?"

"Honestly, that might have been better than what they did. Mr. Soot went to Headmaster Eret and then they told me. I haven't even seen or talked to anyone from the bookstore since before I was in the hospital."

"That's messed up," Ranboo frowned.

"Mr. Soot told Headmaster Eret some bullshit excuse about the bookstore having renovations so they were going to be closed for a few months, but I don't know what to think anymore."

"If I were you, I'd be kind of pissed."

"I thought I would be pissed too, but I'm tired," Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as a familiar ache settled in his chest again. "I'm tired of everything. If they don't want me to work there I can't do anything about it."

Ranboo raised his eyebrow. "Don't you want to know why they fired you?"

Tommy ran his hand down his face. "I appreciate the thought, but it's a moot point. They don't even want to see me, let alone explain why they fired me."

Suddenly Ranboo stopped, making Tommy almost trip.

"You know what, Tommy, I don't think I'm that hungry anymore," Ranboo declared as he made a 180-degree turn.

"Where are you going?" Tommy called out as his roommate walked away from him.

"I'm going to the bookstore!" Ranboo yelled back.

“Dude! Please! This is a such dumb idea!” Tommy pleaded as barely could keep up with Ranboo and his long legs.

“You don’t have to come, I can go on my own,” Ranboo replied.

“They don’t know who you are!”

“Mr. Soot knows who I am and even if he isn’t there then I’ll just explain who I am,” Ranboo shrugged as the two of them were quickly approaching the entrance to the bookstore.

“Ranboo! Stop!” Tommy grabbed his shoulder, forcing Ranboo to pause.

His roommate turned towards him with serious eyes. “Do you actually want me to stop, Tommy?”

Tommy avoided eye contact as he started, “Well, I–”

“Listen, if you genuinely want me to stop, I will. But just know I believe you deserve a real answer for why they fired you.”

“But they even don’t matter anymore.”

“You’re right. They don’t. But *you* matter. *You* deserve respect.”

“Why do you care if I’m respected or not?” Tommy asked, crossing his arms.

“We’re friends, Tommy. Of course, I care if you’re respected or not!”

Tommy was speechless.

Had Ranboo just called Tommy *his friend* ?

“You think we’re friends?” his voice now quiet.

Ranboo just gave him a confused look. “Yeah? Are we not friends...?” Suddenly Ranboo dropped his eyes as his face began to redden. “Crap- Tommy, I am so sorry– I didn’t mean to overstep–”

“No! We can be friends!” Tommy interrupted, holding up his hands in defense. “I mean- we are friends! I just thought you didn’t like me! Prime, fuck! I don’t even know what is happening,” He then let out a defeated laugh, “What a fucking mess.”

Ranboo let out a relieved sigh, “Why would you think I didn’t like you? We’ve been hanging out pretty regularly. Plus you even said my name correctly when you stopped me earlier.”

Tommy awkwardly shifted in place. “Well, I’ve been kind of a dick to you since you came. I thought you were pitying me whenever we hung out.”

“Well, if I had to dorm with the guy that replaced me in my old job, I also wouldn’t be too fond of the guy at first either,” Ranboo smiled.

“Seriously, I’m sorry,” Tommy apologized. “I didn’t–”

“Plus if I were to pity you, I would pity how short you are.”

“I am not fucking short!”

“Shorter than me,” his extremely-above-average-height roommate smirked.

“I no longer want to be friends with you.”

“You know that doesn’t stop me from still considering *you* as *my* friend, right?”

“I’m already regretting this,” Tommy deadpanned.

Ranboo laughed before continuing, “Hey, I know we came here to confront Mr. Soot, but we don’t have to if you don’t want to. I was just a bit upset for you.”

“It’s fi–” Tommy started, but he stopped himself. He looked past Ranboo’s shoulder and could just barely make out the store windows. He had gotten so caught up in his conversation with Ranboo that he had forgotten about the aching in his chest.

But Tommy was done trying to mask his feelings. He was tired of ignoring the unknown fact of what happened. He wanted to know. He deserved to know.

“Actually, you’re right,” Tommy continued.

“I am?”

“I think I do want an answer for why I got fired... but I think I’m going to go ask them by myself.”

Worry filled his roommate’s face. “Are you sure? I can come with you if you want?”

Tommy shook his head. “It’s okay. I got it. Thanks, Ran-boob.”

“I guess that was inevitable, wasn’t it?”

—

He rubbed his hands together to gain feeling in them as he stood staring at the wooden door. A feeling of odd *deja vu* swept over him. The last time he had awkwardly stood in front of this door, Techno had promptly helped him when he had almost passed out. Before that Mr. Soot had worried about his sleeping habits. And at the end of that night, Phil had even sent him home with homecooked meals.

Tommy let out a sigh. He had no one to blame but himself. He knew better. He knew that these were just acts of kindness with no meaning behind them. Techno was helping someone who almost fainted. Mr. Soot was just checking in on a student. Phil was making sure his employee was eating. There was nothing more. There was nothing deeper. He knew this well.

Yet there were small voices of hope that whispered in the back of his head.

If he just got an answer then he could fix the problem. He could change and then they could hire him again. He could go back to the way things were.

Tommy couldn't stand the voice anymore. He needed an answer. It didn't matter what it was. He was done dealing with his feuding thoughts.

He lifted his fist to knock when the door suddenly opened instead.

Tommy took a step back in surprise as Mr. Soot appeared in the doorway.

His former English teacher was looking, not to sugarcoat it, rough.

His sweater vest and dress pants had been replaced with an oversized hoodie and sweatpants. His hair was an unbrushed mess and noticeable scruff had started to develop across his face. He adjusted his glasses, but they were not enough to hide the fact that he looked like he hadn't slept properly for days.

"What are you doing here, Tommy?" his voice was coarse as if it hurt to speak.

"I— I was—" Tommy tried to say, but his mind was moving far too fast. The right words were just barely escaping his tongue. "Well— I was just wondering—"

"Didn't Eret tell you? We're closed," Mr. Soot stated flatly, his eyes avoiding Tommy's.

Tommy twisted his fingers together as he forced himself to unclench his jaw. "No, yeah, Headmaster Eret talked to me. I guess... well... I was wondering... um... why?"

"Why what?"

"Well... why did you fire me?"

Mr. Soot let out a deep sigh as he rubbed his temples. "We are closed. Like indefinitely. That means that we don't need an employee."

His thumbs returned to rubbing the scars as the ache in his chest became more apparent. "Oh, okay..."

"I'm sorry, Tommy," Mr. Soot said as he place his hand on the handle and began to close the door.

The whispers weren't satisfied with that. *That couldn't be it. They couldn't just leave him because the store had closed. There had to be more.*

“Is the store phone broken?” Tommy blurted out.

Mr. Soot paused. “Uh, I’m not sure.”

“Oh well, I just was wondering because I called a few times when I was in the hospital.”

“Tom—”

“I’m fine now though! I got out a week ago! I healed up pretty well. I just thought you guys would want to know, ya know?” Tommy continued.

“I—”

“No, no. It’s okay! I guess you guys were just a bit busy with the store to even check in on me. I almost bled out on the street, but that’s nothing compared to your little bookstore getting a few renovations!” Tommy’s voice was starting to rise. “Honestly, I didn’t mind that you ghosted me after I almost died! But you guys really had to put the nail in the coffin when you didn’t even have the balls to tell me I was *fired to my face*. You had someone else do it! Real fucking professional, *Mr. Soot*. ”

Tommy tried to keep himself from shaking. He wanted his words to hurt. He wanted Mr. Soot to feel the same aching pain that haunted his mind for the past 2 weeks.

But,

his former teacher didn’t even look phased. It was like the conversation was making him bored.

“You really want to know why we didn’t contact you, Tommy?” Mr. Soot’s dark stare made him want to take another step back. “ Alright. I’ll tell you. *We didn’t even notice you were gone.* ”

... *what?*

Mr. Soot continued without even missing a beat, “We didn’t even really need you in the first place but when you stopped coming in we just thought you were ditching because I was no longer coming to school. You stopped coming and life kept on moving on for us.”

“But I tried to call...” Tommy’s voice was so quiet, it barely was a whisper.

“I don’t know what to tell you,” His voice was short and stiff. It didn’t need to be winter for Tommy to feel the cold radiating off of him. “Stuff came up and now we can’t support you anymore. It’s not our fault that you weren’t here. I mentioned you to Eret when I went in on my last day out of basic courtesy.”

“But...” but the words died on his tongue. He couldn’t even string words to respond.

“Just leave, Tommy. There’s nothing for you here,” Mr. Soot muttered before finally turning away and shutting the door in his face.

A sharp wind cut through his jacket. The whispers were finally quiet.

The fluorescent lights of the dorm hummed as Tommy lay staring at the ceiling. He was trying to determine the color of the paint. Some would try to say it was white, but it was beige. Pure white would be too stark. It would be too noticeable. People would pay attention to it and point out how it looked odd in a dorm room of three teenage boys.

But beige was just a bit off. It was similar to white but it also wasn't. It blended into the background. It was light enough to reflect light when the sun poured through the window, but also dark enough that it wouldn't blind someone if they looked at it. No one complained about beige because no one cared enough to even think about it. No one noticed beige because it didn't really matter. It did nothing of value. It was useless.

Tommy rolled to his side, shoving his face into his pillow. There was no use in checking his phone. Ranboo had texted him that he got called into work and Tubbo hadn't been in the room when Tommy had returned. He had tried to message Tubbo, but he hadn't gotten a response yet.

A few weeks ago Tommy would have taken this time to go jump along rooftops. Maybe the wind rushing through his hair would help calm his spinning mind. Maybe hearing the crunching of gravel under his shoes would ease his stiff legs. Maybe gazing over the buildings of Central L'Manburg would get his eyes to stop stinging.

Tommy rolled over to his older side, failing to get comfortable. There was no reason to think those things would help. Being a vigilante had only caused him problems.

Maybe being a vigilante wasn't the problem, Tommy thought. *Maybe it's just me.*

"Hey, are you okay?" A voice suddenly called out.

Tommy shot up, his body floating in response and making him smack his head on the ceiling.

"Fuck!" Tommy yelped as he held his head and reinstated his gravity. Tommy turned to find Tubbo standing next to the bunk, a worried look covering his face.

"Shit! Sorry, Tommy!" his roommate apologized. "I didn't realize you were sleeping."

"You're fine. I wasn't having very good luck anyways. When the fuck did you even come in?"

"I just came back a few minutes ago. Weren't you supposed to be studying? Ranboo texted me something about meeting you guys in the library when I woke up."

“We studied for a bit, but then we decided to go get lunch. However... um... Ranboo convinced me to go to the bookstore instead,” Tommy admitted as he picked at a hang nail.

“Why in the world would you go back there after they were such dicks to you?”

Tommy ran his hand through his hair. “I don’t know... I was dumb. I thought, maybe...” He hesitated before pushing away the memory of Mr. Soot out of his mind. Tubbo didn’t need to hear the details of how much of an asshole Mr. Soot was. None of it really mattered anymore.

“Anyway, it was a useless trip. No one was there,” he lied through a clenched jaw.

“I still can’t believe they did that to you,” Tubbo criticized. “What fucking assholes.”

“I’m kind of tired thinking about it,” Tommy shrugged as he threw his legs over the bed and jumped down. “Oh wait, I never got to ask! How was your thing with Shadow last night? You came back pretty late.”

“It was good! It was nice to learn about the new plant that he brought in!” Tubbo replied, a smile forming across his face. “It did take forever though. After, I slept like a rock.”

“You always sleep like a rock.”

“You look like a rock.”

“Die,” Tommy was back with his epic comebacks.

“Oh no, that one was a bit... *rocky*,” a smirk quickly replaced his roommate’s smile.

“I am going to un-alive you.”

Tubbo shrugged. “I guess I might need to be a bit *boulder* with my next joke . ”

“My ears are bleeding. This is the worst torture ever.”

“You could even say you hit *rock bottom*. ”

Tommy planted his head into his hands and let out a loud groan, making Tubbo laugh.

“Okay! Okay! I’m finished now! I couldn’t resist,” Tubbo reassured. “But you will be glad to know that I didn’t scare you awake just to tell you rock puns.”

Tommy raised his face from his palms and raised an eyebrow. “Did you bring me a pumpkin spice latte?”

“What? No! You don’t like pumpkin spice lattes!”

“You never know! Maybe I’ll like it the next time I try it!” Tommy protested.

Tubbo shook his head in disappointment. “Well, I do not have a pumpkin spice latte. But I have some good news!”

“It can’t be as good as pumpkin spice-flavored coffee,” Tommy deadpanned, resulting in Tubbo punching him in the shoulder.

“You’re so fucking dumb,” his roommate rolled his eyes before continuing, “I got you an interview at Pandora Labs! For a job!”

Tommy’s eyes widened in surprise. “Wait, seriously?”

“Yeah! After I did such a great job with Shadow, I had a meeting with Sam and he mentioned that he was open to new employees. So I causally mentioned you and he said he wanted to meet you!”

“Oh my Prime, you are the fucking best, Tubbo!” Tommy exclaimed. “When’s the interview?”

“That’s the weird part. Since Sam is usually pretty busy, he could only meet you this afternoon,” Tubbo admitted sheepishly.

“This afternoon?! You mean like right now?” Tommy felt his heart drop into his gut. “I’m nowhere near ready for an interview! I’m barely ready to get out of bed!”

Tubbo held up his hands to calm Tommy. “Big man! Chill! You’ll be fine! All you have to do is be yourself!”

“That’s horrible advice! I can’t be myself! I am a terrible employee!”

“Okay, you’re right. Maybe just be a little bit of you! I’ll be there most of the time so you’ll be fine! Don’t freak out!”

“We’re a little bit past the point of me not freaking out,” Tommy began to dig through his dresser looking for something acceptable to wear for an interview.

“Hey, at least we know you’re not taking this for *granite* .”

“Are you fucking kidding me?!”

—

The grey clouds from earlier in the day seemed like they had come down even lower as the two friends walked along the sidewalk.

“Why the fuck are you speed walking?” Tommy called out as attempted to loosen his tie. He watched as Tubbo’s backpack bounced up and down on his back as he bounded ahead.

“I’m not speed-walking! You’re just fucking slow!” Tubbo replied without even sparing a glance.

Tommy grumbled as he took a few long strides and quickly ended up passing Tubbo. He turned around and taunted, “Who’s fucking slow now? Hm?”

“Still you,” Tubbo said, unimpressed.

“What—”

SMACK

Tommy’s back rammed straight into a light pole and he crumbled to the ground. He jumped back up and whipped around to see that Tubbo hadn’t even slowed down one bit.

“I can’t believe you just left me!” Tommy huffed as he caught up.

“You wouldn’t have run into anything if you just looked where you were going,” Tubbo pointed out.

“You’re my best friend though! You need to be my eyes and ears!”

“You have perfectly functional eyes and ears. However, I do question if your brain is functioning sometimes.”

Tommy held up his middle finger as an incredible comeback before asking, “Where are we going anyways?”

They had just turned into a dimly lit alleyway. Tommy glanced behind him as they walked away from the main street. “I don’t remember this being the route to Pandora,” he continued.

“I decided to take you through a shorter route,” Tubbo replied, “because *someone* decided to take 20 minutes to choose what tie they wanted to wear.”

“It was an important choice! I need to impress Sam!”

“You were picking between two red ties!”

“They were different!”

“Whatever you say...” Tubbo answered, unconvinced. “Doesn’t matter because the back entrance to the labs should be this right up ahead...”

The two of them turned and were met with a brick wall.

“Is it a secret entrance or...” Tommy furrowed his eyebrows.

“Shit!” Tubbo muttered as he whipped out his phone. “Fuck! There’s no service here! Prime, I’m sorry, Tommy. I must’ve taken the wrong turn.”

“It’s okay, we can just turn back—” Tommy’s voice suddenly faltered. He could see his breath.

A shiver ran down his spine as he felt the temperature drop below freezing. It was true that it got cold in L'Manburg in the winter, but today had been no different than the chilly weather they had been having. And there was no reason for the temperature to suddenly drop in the middle of the afternoon.

Unless someone was influencing it.

Tommy spun around to find a familiar man with a white jacket and a gold necklace standing at the entrance of the alley they were in. The hairs on Tommy's neck stood as watched whips of cold air trail off his hands and his red eyes bore into Tommy's.

It was the dude with ice powers from the rail yard.

"Tubbo, get behind me," Tommy's voice was low.

"What is happening?" Tubbo whispered. "Who is that?"

"Vigilante," the man with ice powers called out, catching both of their attention. "You will be coming with me."

Tommy stepped between his friend and the villain with his hands up in defense. "Hey, man. You have the wrong people. We don't know anything about Vigilante."

"I do not have time to argue, Tommy Innit. I know *you are Vigilante* ."

... *the fuck?*

The man continued, "Do not resist. Or I will use force."

"Yeah, fuck that. I'm not going anywhere with you," Tommy sneered as he balled his fists.

"This is your choice," the man stated and immediately stuck out his arm.

"Tubbo! Hide!" Tommy shouted as he sprang to the side, the icy blast barely missing his head, and cracking the wall behind him.

Tubbo slid behind a large garbage bin as Tommy began to fly back and forth between the walls of the narrow alley. Multiple shots of ice embedded themselves into the places Tommy had just been, just barely nipping at his shoes.

The gravity-user was shooting himself up and down, left and right, simply dodging the ice villain's attacks, but he needed to get closer. He forced his hands to stop shaking as he racked his mind for a solution.

Tommy landed and cursed as he saw that he was far too close to the bin that Tubbo was hiding near. He rolled out of the way as whipped past him and hit the metal box with a *bang* .

He felt his face begin to heat up. No. This was the exact reason he had given up being a vigilante. Tubbo was currently in danger because of *him* .

Shockwave's voice was serious, but not cold. "Think about what you want to do. Listen to your body. Listen to your powers."

Tommy hated it when a dick was right.

"Hey, asshole!" he suddenly yelled as he skidded to a stop with his arms stretched out wide. "Hit me!"

Out of the corner of his eye, Tubbo was looking at him with a frown. Tommy ignored it as he stared down at his opponent.

The man hurled another ice blast at him without hesitation. The ex-vigilante flung back into the brick wall as the frost covered his right arm and shoulder.

The villain slowly walked up, making the air colder and colder with each step. Tommy attempted to move his right side, but it was firmly set in place. He gritted his teeth as he tolerated the cold numbness that was slowly encompassing his body.

"It a privilege to be the key, Tommy Innit. Accepting the Egg is painless," the man stated as his red eyes drilled into Tommy.

A smirk crawled along Tommy's face. "I wish I could say the same to you."

He stuck his free hand out and struck the man's chest with his palm. The villain's gravitational pull was immediately changed and the man flew backward, slamming into the opposite wall. The man dropped to the ground as Tommy turned his attention to increasing the pressure on the ice that was holding him in place. The ice quickly crumbled and Tommy wrenched his arm free.

He then focused back on his opponent who was slowly standing up to face him again. But the ex-vigilante didn't give him the chance.

Just as he smashed his fist into the face of the villain, he increased the gravity. And the man with ice powers hit the ground, unconscious.

Tommy's shoulders rose and fell as he caught his breath. He slowly uncurled his throbbing fist, wincing at the sharp pains. Something was broken there.

The sound of shuffling made him turn his head and saw Tubbo who was slowly stepping out from his hiding spot.

Tommy let out a sigh of relief at the sight of his friend. "Are you okay?"

Tubbo walked closer, clutching his backpack. "Yeah, I am. But is he..." Tubbo's eyes drifted to the man laying face down on the pavement.

Tommy followed his eyes and noticed the man's back was slightly still moving. Tommy let out another sigh of relief. He didn't need anything else on his conscious. "It seems like he's still alive so I think we're in the clear."

Tubbo let out a light laugh. “Oh, good. I actually liked Punz.”

“Yeah...”

Wait.

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows and began to turn toward his friend. “Who is—”

A sharp pain cut him off. With wide eyes, he looked down to find a dart sticking out of his shoulder.

Immediately, Tommy started to lose feeling in his limbs. His eyes began to droop and darkness was brushing the edges of his vision. It was as if his whole body was suddenly shutting down. His knees buckled and he barely caught himself as he fell to the ground.

His breath stopped in his throat he craned his head up to see Tubbo slowly lowering a gun.

“Don’t worry, Tommy,” An unfamiliar smile formed on his best friend’s face. “This is an honor.”

As Tommy lost consciousness, he wondered when Tubbo’s eyes had turned red.

Chapter End Notes

listen,,, blame Percy Jackson

Check me out on all my socials as well! You can ask me questions and/or send me art about the story in any of these places!!

[**My Twitch**](#)

[**My YouTube**](#)

[**The Untitled Discord**](#)

[**My Instagram**](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #15: Predeveloped Poultry is NOT Pog

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets to meet up with some familiar faces in a not-so-familiar place.

Chapter Notes

Hi! Hi! Sorry for the cliffhanger... you know me ;)

Thank you all for the wonderful comments on the last chapter! <3 I'm so glad that you're enjoying the story! I'm trying my best to just have fun with it and seeing the response to it is just amazing!

Once again I cannot promise the next chapter will be coming out soon just because I am exploring other things! But I promise that this fic is not abandoned, just slow lol If you'd like to see progress or discussions I do talk about it p frequently on stream and my socials so if you like that kind of stuff consider checking me out over there! All the links will be at the end! (shameless plug I gotta clock in my clout points lolol)

Anyways hope you enjoy the chapter! (also if you see any spelling or grammar mistakes,,,,, shhhhhh don't worry,,,,)

TW // gun-mention, blood-mention, pain-attack descriptions

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy's eyes fluttered open. He blinked the blurriness out of his eyes as he found himself in a dimly lit room. Confusion fogged his mind as he tried to understand where he was. He attempted to look around but his movement was quickly stopped by cold metal cuffs around his wrists that were chained to the wall behind him.

Suddenly the memories of the previous day washed over him. He had studied with Ranboo and Aimsey. He became friends with Ranboo. Then he had seen Wilbur at the bookstore. That hadn't gone well but it was okay because Tubbo had come with good news. But then the ice-powered villain attacked them. Tommy had to protect Tubbo and fought the ice villain. Tommy had won. He saw the villain on the ground. And then... then... a tranquilizer dart was in Tommy's shoulder. Someone... had shot him...

Tubbo had shot—

Tommy shook his head. He must have hit his head when he had been knocked out. There was no fucking way Tubbo had shot him. That would be ridiculous. Tubbo was his best friend. There was no chance that he could have done something like this.

“Hello, Tommy,” a voice made him snap his head up.

Confusion settled into his eyebrows as his eyes landed on the owner of the voice. He was a man that Tommy had met dozens of times. He was the same hero who brought muffins to the office for everyone (even assistants) every Wednesday. The hero who had bickered with Blaze about patrol routes and offered to take Dream’s night patrol hours so he could get sleep. The hero who could travel through the shadows but always gave a kind smile to Tommy even after scolding him for his foul mouth.

But there was no kindness in Shadow’s face as he smiled down on him now.

Tommy lurched forward, pulling on the chains and yelling, “Shadow?! What the hell is happening? Where the fuck am I?!”

Shadow crossed his arms and replied coolly, “You know how I feel about using foul language.”

Tommy’s face twisted into a scowl, “Oh *sorry*, Shadow. But censoring myself right now is kind of on the back of my mind since I’m *literally chained to the fucking wall!* ”

“You wouldn’t be in this position if you had simply agreed to come with Punz.”

“Pun- you mean the guy that tried to turn me into an ice cube? You guys are all fucking lunatics! Where am I?!” His arms were beginning to ache from the uncomfortable position he was in, but that was nothing compared to the throbbing pain that encompassed his head.

Shadow let out a disappointed sigh before kneeling to be at eye level with Tommy. “You have been chosen for a great purpose,” His voice was soft as if Tommy was a disobedient child and not a person that had just been kidnapped. “Please stop being so difficult.”

His head was screaming, but the heat of anger (or was it fear?) was stronger. Tommy gritted his teeth and spat out a kind reply, “Fuck. You.”

The softness on the hero’s face immediately disappeared and he rose to his feet again, looking down unimpressed at the teenager. “If you think this feeble attempt at resistance will succeed, you are wasting your time. Even the strongest minds were able to eventually see that the Egg is not evil. We just want to bring the world together.”

“Yeah, by brainwashing everyone to worship a stupid egg!”

“The Egg is *not stupid!* –” Shadow took a deep breath before continuing, “The Egg is bigger than me or you. The Egg represents a community. A place where there is no conflict or pain. We are working to bring peace to all.”

“For starters, I’m having a difficult time believing you are the good guys since you *fucking kidnapped me!* ”

“Language,” Shadow said as he shot him a glare. “Anyways, you are the one that willingly went with your friend, Tubbo to the extraction point. Punz was just there to pick up the two of you when you decided to attack him.”

A jolt of fear ran through his body at the mention of his roommate. His mind had been so fried since waking up that he hadn’t even realized that his best friend was nowhere to be seen.

“What the fuck did you do to Tubbo?! Where is he?!” Tommy focused on keeping his voice from shaking. “I swear to Prime if you laid your grimy fucking hands on him I will—”

Shadow’s chilling laugh made Tommy’s words stop in his throat. “Tubbo? Well, I guess you can just see for yourself.”

The dark-cloaked hero then raised his wrist to his mouth and muttered something. Not even a few seconds the door on the other side of the room slowly creaked open.

Tommy’s eyes were wide as he watched Tubbo step into the room.

Tommy’s heart dropped into his gut. His headache had now turned into a full-blown migraine as his thoughts spun through his mind. Just a second ago Tommy had been scared out of his mind about the horrible ways they could’ve been torturing his roommate. But now Tubbo was right in front of him and he looked... fine.

“You needed me, Bad?” Tubbo asked, focusing his attention on the hero not even sparing a look at his roommate.

Tubbo showed no signs that he had been in a struggle or hurt in any way. His eyebrows weren’t furrowed together and his eyes weren’t darting around looking for ways to escape. He had no lines of worry or fear on his face and he wasn’t clenching his jaw in anger. In fact, he looked more well-rested than Tommy had seen him for the past few months.

Tubbo was perfectly fine.

Tommy was so stunned that he hadn’t even noticed that Shadow had made his way to stand next to Tubbo. The hero placed a hand on his shoulder and Tubbo didn’t even flinch.

“Oh, Tommy was just asking about you. He was worried that we were hurting you,” Shadow replied, his voice slipping back to that malicious softness.

Tubbo let out a quiet chuckle before looking at him. “No, no. I’m doing great, Tommy! I love it here!”

Tommy was frozen in place as he slowly processed the foreign words. Tubbo... loved it? Here? With the people that had kidnapped him and chained him to a wall? No. *No*. This was *wrong*.

His mind was racing as he felt his breath quicken in response. Tubbo knew how bad the Egg people were. He had been there when he had almost gotten kidnapped the first time and he knew about how Blade had attacked him after killing the man with red eyes. There was no

way they could have gotten Tubbo. He wasn't supposed to be here. Tommy was supposed to be protecting Tubbo from this.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as he forced himself to slow his breaths. His head felt as if his thousands of thoughts were clawing at the inside of his skull, trying to get out. Tubbo did actually join— *no* . This must be an act. Tubbo must be acting like he's on their side. That was the only explanation. It *had* to be the explanation because if not—

“Unfortunately, I don't think Tommy agrees with you,” Tommy forced his eyes open to see Shadow shake his head sadly.

A frown spread across Tubbo's face and Tommy felt his stomach twist tighter.

This is an act, Tommy silently reassured himself. *He's just doing this to get their trust.*

“Oh, that's awful,” Tubbo answered sadly as he lowered his head.

Shadow gently placed his hand on Tubbo's shoulder, making him look up at the hero. “But maybe, you can help me convince him to stay. What do you think?”

“I think that's a great idea, Bad!”

Shadow clapped his hands together. “Fantastic! I will leave you two alone so you can catch up! Do what you need to do, Tubbo.”

Good, he's getting Shadow out of the room so we can escape, Tommy thought.

Then after a final pat on Tubbo's shoulder, Shadow turned to leave the room. A few beats of silence passed as Tommy's heartbeat pounded in his ears. The two roommates stared as the hero gently closed the door with a *click* , leaving the two of them alone.

Tommy let out a soft sigh before looking up at his best friend, “You scared me for a second there, Boss Man.”

Tubbo slightly furrowed his eyebrows as he came closer to Tommy, “How so?”

“No one's here, Tubbo. You can drop the act,” The chains jingled as he twisted uncomfortably. “Now get me out of these things so we can escape.”

“I can't do that.”

“Stop fucking with me. It's not funny.”

“I know it may seem scary at first, but—”

“Drop the act,” Tommy cut off Tubbo. He could feel his heart starting to hammer faster in his chest. “It's creepy.”

“It's not a fucking act.”

Tommy raised his head and the realization felt like Tubbo had punched him in the gut. No matter how hard Tommy could try to convince himself that nothing was wrong, that Tubbo was putting on an act, the truth was undeniable.

Tubbo's eyes were red.

You've been given a chance to do something important, Tommy! The Egg can give us everything we've wanted. Why can't you see that this is a good thing?"

Black spots danced around his vision, his migraine reminding him that his head felt like it was going to explode at any moment. Through gritted teeth, he tried to steady his voice as much as possible, "Listen to me, Tubbo. You need to fight this. You are not one of them. They are *evil*."

This made Tubbo raise an eyebrow. "And what constitutes them as being evil? The fact that they are actually working to make actual changes in a society where a clear power imbalance manipulates and hurts people?"

"They literally kidnapped me!"

"You used to break the law every day to go beat up random people!"

"They are not random people! They are criminals! Bad guys!"

"Oh, the same people that you went and trained with? Who then tried to murder you and discovered your secret identity and as a result put everyone you know in danger?!" Tubbo shot back. "As if I'm going to start trusting your moral compass now!"

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out. He couldn't deny the truth of Tubbo's words.

Tubbo let out a defeated sigh. "Listen, I did try to fight the Egg when I first heard it. But after a while, I couldn't deny the fact that its ideas made sense." Tubbo took a step closer, a sympathetic look covering his face. "The Egg is a bit hard to understand, but it helps guide people! If we all share the same ideas and beliefs then there would be no conflict! You wouldn't have to fight anyone anymore!"

"There would be no conflict because the Egg takes away people's free will! I don't want to be a mindless zombie to some predeveloped poultry!"

Tubbo's soft look was quickly replaced with annoyance. He turned away shaking his head as if Tommy was the one that was making insane claims.

A few beats passed of Tubbo keeping his back to his roommate. However, Tommy forced himself to break the silence even though thinking at this point felt like nails were being hammered into his head.

"Come on, Tubbo. Just let me out and I can help you," Tommy pleaded.

Tubbo's humorless laugh echoed throughout the room. He turned back to Tommy with a look of disbelief as he scoffed, "You got to be fucking kidding me."

"We can fight this together!" Tommy tried to move closer, pulling at the chains again.

"We? *WE?*" His best friend's face twisted into disgust. "Tommy Innit, you are the biggest *fucking hypocrite* I have ever met. And I have met *fucking Dream*."

"Clearly the Egg has messed with—"

"Don't fucking pull that on me!" Tubbo's voice was dripping with venom. "I am perfectly sound to know that you are *selfish*."

"You don't mean that," Tommy's voice was so quiet he could barely hear it over the blood roaring in his ears.

"All you've ever cared about is yourself. And you know what I played right into your hand. Because I was stupid enough to care about you too! I've done so much for you, Tommy. Who tutored you when you were about to fail out of school? Who reminds you to go to class? Who lied and stole for you? Fuck, Tommy, I picked your half-dead body from the side of the road! You wouldn't be alive without me! But when I get worried about your safety I am made to look like I'm being irrational!"

The words were razor-sharp as they plunged into his mind. Each one digging deeper and deeper. The taste of iron filled his mouth as he bit the side of his mouth to keep himself standing.

"Yet you still went out to play 'pretend-hero' just to get the shit beat out of you every single night," Tubbo continued, his red eyes filled with icy rage. "But when an opportunity for you to actually help people comes up, you back down like a *fucking coward*. I don't understand you, Tommy! What are you trying to prove? What do you actually want? Do you actually want to help people or do you just enjoy getting high on your fucking power trip?"

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut. Every part of his body felt like it was being beaten to a pulp. "Please—"

"You act so high and mighty. Just like the superheroes you say you fucking hate. You think that you have the right to judge others and their actions, but the truth is you can't because *you are not a good person*."

Tommy couldn't even deny it because Tubbo was right.

He dropped his head, his eyes on the ground now. What did he want? He became a vigilante because he was mad at Dream for brushing him aside. Was that a valid reason to repeatedly break the law and cause chaos? How many people were put in danger because of his recklessness? Because of his selfish desire to prove Dream wrong?

And even when he tried to stop vigilante, his past actions caught up to him. He was so obsessed with his own thoughts and problems that he didn't even notice that his friend got

brainwashed by a cult.

Time and time again, Tommy had proved that no matter what he did, he was destined to fail. As Dream's assistant. As a vigilante. As an employee. As a student. As a roommate. As a best friend. Every single thing he did, he failed.

His legs gave out and sharp pains ran up his arms as he limply dangled from the chains. Tommy choked out, "I- I'm sorry."

A hand touched his shoulder and he looked up to find Tubbo standing in front of him.

The anger had faded from his eyes as he replied, "It's okay. We can make things right again with the help of the Egg."

By all accounts, Tommy hadn't just failed miserably, but he had also lost. He was chained to the wall with no route of escape and his best friend was being mind-controlled by a giant evil Egg. Most people would just give in to the screaming headache that hammered at the back of their skulls.

"I'm sorry," Tommy repeated, his voice a bit more clear now.

"Don't worry. When you accept the Egg you will understand the purpose of all of this. It will tell you what you need to do to be better."

But Tommy wasn't like most people. If he was going to ruin his life, then it was going to be on his terms.

"I am sorry. You're right. I *am* selfish. I am selfish enough to not want to be controlled by a fucking chicken fetus."

"Wha—" Tubbo was cut off by Tommy slamming his head into Tubbo's forehead.

Tubbo stumbled back, clutching his head and cursing repeatedly under his breath.

Tommy blinked away the darkness that had begun to surround his vision as he yelled, "Did that work? Did I crack the Egg out of your head?"

"You are a fucking idiot!" Tubbo replied, his unchanged red eyes glaring at him.

Tommy frowned at his failed attempt at getting his best friend to snap out of it. He wasn't a good person. He wasn't a good friend. But that didn't matter right now. Tommy wasn't leaving Tubbo behind.

"I want that dumb fucking Egg to know that I will *never* accept it. I will never be its key or whatever stupid shit it wants me to be."

"You are making a huge mistake. You do not want to be enemies with the Egg," Tubbo's gaze darkened. It was like something had switched inside of him.

"Too fucking late," Tommy snapped back.

Tubbo opened his mouth to reply but was interrupted by the sound of the door swinging open behind him.

The first person to step through the doorway was a man that Tommy never wanted to see again. The pale blond-haired man—Punz as Tubbo and Shadow had called him— was dressed in his usual white jack and gold chain attire. It seemed like he has cleaned up after getting his ass handed to himself by Tommy.

If Tommy hadn't been chained to the wall, there was no doubt in his mind he would have fallen over the second he saw the next person who enter the room. Tommy immediately recognized that deep purple cloak that left trails of dark smoke.

It was Ender.

—

“Bad said that you would know what to do with him,” Punz stated flatly as Ender struggled in his grip.

The sidekick's face was unreadable under his black and white mask, but once he realized where he was he froze in place.

Tubbo and Tommy stood in a similar stance as they slowly processed the scene in front of them.

However, it was Tommy who spoke first.

“Why the fuck is Ender here?” His eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“This is a mistake,” Ender said as he resumed attempting to break free from Punz. “I was just on patrol—”

Tubbo's cold laugh rang out, bouncing off the high ceiling of the holding cell. All three pairs of eyes were on the brunette as he slowly composed himself again. He finished by turning towards the sidekick, “If you wanted to reach us so urgently then you could've just texted. We would've been back for pizza night.”

... *what?*

Tommy's brain must have glitched. Did he just hear Tubbo say that Ender could text him?

How the fuck did Tubbo know Ender?

This must have also thrown Ender off because he froze again. He then cleared his voice as if to lower its pitch before speaking, “Civilian, I do not believe we have met—”

“You’re fucking joking!” Tubbo scoffed, his face painted with disbelief that Ender even attempted to do something like that. His roommate then glanced over at Tommy before focusing on Ender again. “Are you seriously trying to protect Tommy right now?”

Tommy felt like he was hearing every other word of the conversation between his best friend and the sidekick of the number one hero. However, Tommy was not in the mood to think any harder. His head was now pounding so hard that he was actively trying not to empty the contents of his stomach.

“What the fuck are you two going on about?!” Tommy yelled and now all eyes were on him now.

Tubbo blinked before a sneer slowly spread across his face. “Now come on, Tommy. You’re not actually that dense, are you?”

Tommy’s eyes darted between Tubbo and Ender, racking his mind for a plausible answer but nothing came up. In what way could have these two ever met? Let alone meet for long enough that they would exchange contact information?

Tubbo let out another chilling laugh as he began to walk towards Ender. “You never wondered how Dream got a sidekick almost immediately after he replaced you?”

“Tubbo, please. Don’t do this,” Ender pleaded as the brunette stood in front of him.

“What the fuck does that have to do with anything?” Tommy questioned through a clenched jaw. “I was his assistant, not his sidekick!”

“Tommy,” His patronizing tone made Tommy dig his nails into his palms. “You didn’t seriously think you’re the only one with secrets?” Tubbo answered.

“Tubbo, don’t—” Ender was cut off by Tubbo grabbing his mask and ripping it off.

Tommy wasn’t supposed to recognize the face of Dream’s sidekick. In theory, Tommy had never even met Ender. Vigilante had been the one to fight the hero apprentice multiple times.

But the reality was cruel.

Ender had the same face as Tommy’s newest friend.

Ender had the same face as Tommy’s dual-haired roommate.

Ender had the same face as Ranboo.

“What the fuck...” his words were no louder than a whisper.

Ender was Ranboo.

The realization washed over him like a wave, filling up his lungs and stopping him from taking another breath. Suddenly everything made sense. Ranboo’s insane hours. His weird incoherent feelings towards Ender. Dream’s clear favoritism towards him.

Dream hadn't just replaced Tommy. Dream had replaced Tommy with a better version of himself.

Uncontrolled thoughts spiraled around his head, increasing the pain of his headache tenfold. He gripped the chains that held him up, the metal digging into his skin, in a feeble attempt to keep himself conscious. A cold sweat covered his whole body now.

And Tubbo had known. Tubbo knew that Ranboo was Ender. Tubbo knew that Tommy was Vigilante. He had known this entire time.

Too much was happening. Tommy's head was back to remind him that he barely functioning. The ache pounded as fast as the heart racing in his ribcage. He needed to focus. He needed to get back to getting Tubbo to snap out of it. His jaw was clenched so hard that his teeth could crack any second now. He *needed to get it together*.

But all he could was gape at his roommates, frozen in shock.

Ranboo stared back at him with horror covering his whole face. Tommy's face probably mirrored his.

"Tommy..." Ranboo's voice trailed off. It seemed like the words were evading him as a suffocating silence wrapped around them.

However, this was not the case for their third roommate.

Tubbo let out a cruel laugh as he ran a hand through his hair. "You are so fucking dumb, Tommy! You're so oblivious that the sidekick of the city's most famous hero literally was living with you and you didn't notice! You fought him multiple times and you *still* had no idea? You didn't even suspect him! What a fucking joke!"

He tried to make eye contact with Ranboo, but his dual-haired roommate quickly broke eye contact. Tommy hadn't fought Ender... Vigilante was the one...

The hole in Tommy's chest grew deeper.

"Does he know..." he couldn't even finish the sentence. He didn't want the sentence to be true.

"Oh my Prime! Tommy look at his face!" Tubbo gestured towards Ranboo who was still shamefully looking at the ground. "Of course, he fucking knows! Everyone knows that you're Vigilante! If random criminals can find out your identity then why the hell wouldn't your roommates figure it out?!"

"I just- I don't-" Tommy stammered; his mind felt like it ripping apart by the seams.

"It's because you're willingly ignorant. You live in a fantasy world where you are this secret hero that is fighting the system even when the world is against you. You think that you're some kind of special person that has the *job* to help everyone! You just *need* to help others! Like some self-righteous prick!" Tubbo's red eyes bore into him, the anger making his best friend unrecognizable. "News flash! You're not special! No one cares that you break the law

to 'help' people! We live in a society of *fucking superheroes*! In reality, you are even less than special. Even with superpowers you somehow find a way to fuck up every single part of your life."

Tubbo took a step closer. Tommy winced at the icy rage that radiated off of him.

"You're a fucking mistake."

A mistake.

The word echoed through his body. It filled every inch of his mind. It enveloped the little air left in his lungs. It sheathed itself in his heart.

His eyes burned as he croaked out, "The egg is making you say this... you don't mean it..."

Tubbo leaned in so close that Tommy could feel his breath on his cheeks. Tommy's blood ran cold as he looked into Tubbo's eyes. The irises flickered to a familiar blue.

"I mean every single word. All you've ever done is make my life worse."

"Tubbo!" Ranboo's voice rang out, making Tubbo spin around.

A deep gasp of air entered Tommy's lungs and made him wrench forward, coughing. He hadn't even realized that he hadn't been breathing.

"This isn't you. Please stop," Ranboo pleaded with serious eyes .

Tubbo rolled his eyes, "Big talk coming from the guy whose entire life is a fucking lie."

Ranboo winced at the insult, but continued to press his roommate, "You don't have to do this. Whatever the Egg is offering you, it isn't worth this."

"The Egg actually offered me a way to protect my best friend," Tubbo said with a sharp glare at Tommy. "But it seems like he doesn't feel the same way."

The Egg had offered Tubbo a way to protect Tommy. The thing that Tubbo desired the most was a way to take care of his friend. A way to keep him alive.

The hole in his chest became a gaping pit.

"Tubbo—" Tommy's soft voice was swiftly cut off.

"I'm done with you, Tommy. You've made your stance very clear," Tubbo sharply replied. He then turned back to Ranboo. "But my other roommate has a chance to make it up."

Ranboo furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. "What?"

"You've been in the proximity of the Egg long enough to start hearing its voice, haven't you?"

Ranboo stiffened, "Don't do this, Tubbo."

Tubbo raised his hands in mock defense. "I'm not doing anything! I'm just giving you a choice." He then directed his focus to the pale-haired man. "Punz, let him go."

"If I let him go then he'll just teleport away," Punz stated flatly.

"No, he won't," A smirk formed on Tubbo's face as he walked up to the ice-powered villain and held out his hand. "Give me your gun."

"Are you sure about this?" Punz asked.

"Who was the one who actually caught Tommy? *On the first try*. Hand me the fucking gun," Tubbo spat back. Punz grunted before placing the gun in Tubbo's hand. He then released his grip on Ranboo who watched in disbelief.

"Whatever," Punz muttered before exiting the room and leaving the three of them alone.

Ranboo stood frozen as Tubbo slowly turned the gun over in his hand.

Tommy and Ranboo shared a wide-eyed glance, before Tommy forced his voice out, "Tubbo, you can't actually be thinking about threatening to shoot Ranboo?"

"Oh, I can't shoot Ranboo. He would just teleport away before the bullet even left the gun," Tubbo replied, his eyes still on the gun.

"However," Tubbo lifted his head to make eye contact with Tommy, "you're not going anywhere."

A feeling of déjà vu washed over him as he watched Tubbo raise the gun in his direction.

"Tubbo! Stop!" Ranboo yelled.

"Make a choice, Ranboo. Accept the Egg or I'll shoot Tommy," Tubbo stated, his voice hollow.

"Tubbo, please snap out of this," Tommy begged. He pulled the chains again as the cuffs cut into his wrists.

Ranboo attempted to step forward, but Tubbo's head snapped in his direction. "If you try anything, I will not hesitate to fucking shoot him."

"This is insane! He is your best friend! Put the gun down!"

"No friend of mine would reject the Egg! He is nothing to me!" Tubbo snapped.

Tommy wrenched at the chains, twisting and jerking as hard as he could with different levels of gravity, but his powers had no effect on them. He turned back to the scene with wide eyes, realizing that he had no way out of this.

The Egg had twisted his friend's mind so much that Tubbo saw him as an enemy. Tommy felt sick.

They were in an impossible position.

Ranboo had to decide between being mind-controlled or letting him die.

And there was nothing Tommy could do.

“Ranboo, listen, I’ll let him go,” Tubbo’s voice had lowered back to normal. “You just need to accept the Egg.”

“I swear to Prime, Ranboo, if you accept that fucking Egg, I will never forgive you!” Tommy shouted.

Ranboo gripped his head, pain lacing his face. “Of course, I don’t want to accept the Egg, Tommy, but what choice do I have?”

“Don’t fucking accept it!”

“Tubbo will shoot you!”

“Shut the fuck up!” Tubbo demanded. “Ranboo, it’s time to decide.”

“Wait, Tubbo,” Ranboo held up his hands.

“Five,” Tubbo began counting down.

“Tubbo! Snap out of it!” Tommy’s throat was hoarse from screaming.

“Four.”

“Crap, I need more time!”

“Shit, shit, shit!”

“Three.”

“Please listen to us! There needs to be another way!”

“Fuck! Ranboo get out of here!”

“Two.”

“What the hell? I’m not leaving you!”

“Ranboo, GO!”

“One.”

BANG

And Tommy’s vision went black.

Pain exploded across his back. Tommy moaned as he lay on the ground, but the pain quickly turned into an annoying ache.

Wait.

Tommy jolted up and patted his body down. Didn't he just get shot?

"What the fuck?" Tommy muttered under his breath. He twisted his neck to see that he was no longer chained to the wall of some unknown cell. He was actually in a place he knew very well. He was back in his dorm room. The sunset light poured through the shutters, making golden lines spread across the floor and walls.

A soft groan came from behind him, making him whip his head around to see a purple shape slightly moving.

"Ranboo!" Tommy yelped as he shot up.

He gently rolled over his roommate to find his face pale and beaded in sweat. Ranboo slowly opened his eyes and let out a soft sigh. "Hey, Tommy."

"What the fuck did you do?" Tommy demanded.

"I couldn't leave you there," Ranboo admitted before his face winced in pain. "Damn it," he muttered as he lifted his hand from his side. Tommy's breath hitched in his throat. It was covered in blood.

"Shit! We need to get you to a hospital!"

Ranboo's eyes went wide. "No! No, please, Tommy. I'm fine."

"You got shot! You need to go to the hospital!"

"I can't! I wasn't supposed to be following you! If I go to the hospital then Dream will find out. He can't find out."

Tommy frowned at the mention of his previous employer. He knew exactly what Ranboo thinking right now. Dream didn't stand for disobedience. He hated even the most minor inconvenience. If he found out that Ranboo strayed from his patrol route and then got hurt in the process, the gunshot wound would be the least of his problems.

He let out a sigh. "What the fuck are we supposed to do? You're bleeding all over the floor!"

"I can handle it. We just have to stop the bleeding for a bit and I can go to the nurse once it slows down."

“You’re a literal superhero! You know that’s exactly what you’re *not* supposed to do with a gunshot wound!”

“I don’t–” Ranboo recoiled in pain as he tried to sit up.

Tommy placed his hand on his shoulder and forced him to lie down. “Don’t move. I’ll increase your gravity if I have to.”

“I don’t care what you do, all I know is that I cannot go to the hospital. At least not right now.”

Tommy pinched his temple searching his mind for an answer. The last thing he needed right now was his roommate bleeding out on their dorm room floor.

He looked around searching for anything that could help plug the wound when his eyes landed on something familiar.

A pink fanny pack.

A convenient memory formed in his head.

Fuck .

Tommy pushed himself to his feet before he could talk himself out of his stupid idea. He grabbed the bag and zipped it open. Squinting in the dim light, he rifled through the contents of the bag.

“What are you doing?” Ranboo softly asked.

“Getting help.”

“Tommy, I can’t–”

“It’s not the hospital,” Tommy interrupted before sighing in relief. He lifted out a small card from the pack. He whipped out his phone and quickly typed the numbers before he had a chance to hesitate.

“I wish it was though,” Tommy muttered under his breath before lifting the phone to his ear.

His gut began to twist in knots as the droning of the phone filled his ear. He balled his open hand into a fist, trying to ignore the feeling of the scar on his palm.

He had no choice.

He had run out of options.

He heard the sound of a *click* before a voice he never had planned to hear again came through, “*This is a classified number.*”

“Cut the shit, Angel. I’m calling in my favor.”

Chapter End Notes

well well I guess we finally get to have some plot progression

Thank you again for all the lovely comments! If you need to scream in the comments I will not mind. I completely understand lolol

Also! if you'd like some fluff after the angst! Here is a lovely story about Wilbur learning how to use his powers when he was young: [Heartbeats by KatSaysYes](#) please go give it a read and drop a comment! <3

Here are all the links to my various social medias! Clout Points are secured!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #16: Cash In Favors Before They Expire

Chapter Summary

Tommy uses his favor.

Chapter Notes

The knife was above Tommy's jugular, the blade almost knicking his throat when-

"This fic isn't abandoned," Tommy whispers to Dream.

It is enough to cause the masked man to hesitate, a singular tear escaping his cerulean orbs. "Finally, someone who fucking read the author's note."

Dream immediately drops all his defenses, giving Tommy the room to speak up.

"Of course, I read the author's note, I'm not a fucking heathen. It's why I know the author said she'd update slower, but that doesn't mean our story is over."

"I couldn't have said it better myself."

But it is not Dream's voice that says this.

Tommy's eyes widen at the unmistakable voice that is his savior, his family, and his reason to keep on going. The one man, dare he say, the only man ever in the history of ever, to not let Tommy down.

It's him.

It's main character Sapnap.

"Since you practiced basic fanfic etiquette, Dream has agreed to let you go home safely.

Stay gold, ponyboy."

The End.

- A beautiful story by MaiConnected

tw // description of panic attacks, blood mention

p.s. if you see any grammar mistakes or misspellings.... no you don't :D

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy squinted in the setting sunlight as he scanned the horizon for movement. He should've been here by now.

Where the fuck is that oversized pigeon-looking-ass criminal? Tommy thought. *I don't have fucking time for this. Ranboo does not have time-*

"Hey Tommy, can you let up a little?" Ranboo asked.

“Oh fuck. I’m sorry,” Tommy apologized as he softened the pressure on Ranboo’s wound. Tommy forced himself to keep his eyes away from the warm blood spreading beneath his hands. However, he couldn’t stop the scars on his palms from aching as if the blood he was holding in was his. It was like they remembered how it felt to have the blood pour out—

No. He couldn’t think about that right now. He needed to focus on Ranboo.

“It’s okay,” his roommate replied. “However, I have to ask... why is the Syndicate helping me? I know you mentioned the favor and all, but the last time I saw them I tried to arrest them. Wouldn’t it be better for them to let me rot?”

Tommy sighed. After his short conversation with Angel on the phone, Tommy and Ranboo made their way to the roof of the school to wait for the criminal. At that time, Tommy had told Ranboo about what had happened after the fight between the heroes and the Syndicate that Vigilante crashed.

However, he did omit the part where Blade tried to murder him. There was no need to make Ranboo doubt the Syndicate’s actions any more than he already did. No other reason.

“Listen, I’m the last person to trust those bastards, but they have some sort of healing shit that you need. I could give a shit what happens to them after they give us that,” Tommy answered before shoving his face into his shoulder, trying to adjust his mask again. A month ago his face would be itching each night to wear the red hoodie. Now Tommy questioned if red was even his favorite color.

“Didn’t you say that Shockwave mentored you? Don’t you like these guys?” Ranboo asked. Even though the bottom of his face was covered in a mask again, Tommy could identify the confusion that washed over his face.

“No!” Tommy spat out. “If I had a choice I would never want to see those asswipes ever again!”

“I’ll admit I’ve never been called an asswipe before,” a new voice entered the conversation.

Tommy whipped his head around to find the man he had been waiting for this whole time. The ex-vigilante pushed down the uneasiness in his gut as Angel slowly folded in his large black wings.

“Is that—” Ranboo began.

“Don’t move. I’ll handle this,” Tommy cut him off as he turned to face the villain. He wiped all emotion off his face as he stuck out his hand towards the villain, ignoring the sticky maroon that stained it. “Just give me the healing gel.”

However, Angel didn’t move. Instead, he said, “I’m going to assume the healing gel is not for you,” Tommy watched as Angel’s eyes focused on something behind him, “but for *your friend* over there.”

Through a clenched jaw, Tommy replied, “It’s none of your fucking business. Give me the gel.”

The villain crossed his arms and let out a soft sigh. Tommy scowled at the action. What a fucking prick.

Angel continued, “I can’t give you the gel.”

A beat passed as Tommy processed the words. Then all at once heat filled his face as his mouth twisted in anger. There was no fucking way. *No. Fucking. Way.*

“You BASTARD!” Tommy curled his hands into fists, “You fucking OWE ME! You don’t get to fucking say SHIT! Give me the fucking gel, before I BEAT THE EVER LIVING—”

“For Prime’s sake, Vigilante!” Angel cut him off; his hands up in defense. “Will you let me explain?”

The rage pulsed against his forehead as he replied, “Why the fuck would I allow you to explain shit?”

“I’m not asking why you’re with the Number One Hero’s sidekick, right? But it seems like he has a pretty bad injury. Is it a bullet wound?”

Tommy felt his nails begin to dig into his palms. He hesitated before replying shortly, “Yes.”

“Okay. And did you see an exit wound?”

Tommy resisted the urge to turn and look at Ranboo. He didn’t understand why the fuck Angel was prolonging this. “I don’t know! I was a bit busy trying to plug the gunshot hole that was gushing out blood!”

“So I’ll take that as a no.”

“So what? What the fuck does that have to do with anything?” Tommy snapped.

“It means that your friend still has the bullet inside of him. If I give you the healing and gel and you use it on him right now, you would be healing the bullet inside of him. Do you see where I’m going with this?” Angel raised an eyebrow.

Tommy cursed under his breath. He racked his brain for a solution. Maybe he could get the bullet out using his powers? But that would require him to touch the bullet... fuck. Maybe he could just take it out, but with what? They didn’t have the supplies to perform surgery and it was far too late to go to the nurse who would probably question why he needed tools to—

Angel went on, “I know you only asked me to bring you the gel, but I can perform—”

Tommy cut him off, “No! I don’t need your help! Just give me the gel!”

“Vigilante. I can tell that you care a lot about your friend. But if you actually want to help him, then let you need to let me help him. If not, you could do more harm than good,” Angel

said seriously. There was no hint of malice, no sign of deception. It seemed like Angel was giving him genuine advice.

The heat in his cheeks started to fade and the dusk wind sent a shiver down his spine. He slightly turned towards his roommate and watched as Ranboo's chest rose and fell under his purple cloak.

That was supposed to be him. He was supposed to be the one that got shot ~~by Tubbo~~. But instead, Ranboo had risked his life for him. Once again someone else took the consequences of Tommy's actions.

Tommy closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He didn't have time to wallow in self-pity. Ranboo needed help. That's all that mattered.

Tommy opened his eyes and turned back to Angel and replied, "Fine. Help him."

Angel nodded as he moved towards the sidekick. They both kneeled on opposite sides of Ranboo and Angel lifted the cloak to reveal the wound. His face was unreadable as he assessed the injury before slowly putting down the cloak.

Ranboo groaned slightly before softly asking, "What's going on? Did you get the healing stuff?"

"Um, not quite, Ender," Tommy replied. Slipping back into his vigilante mindset had been easier than he expected. He then turned his attention to the criminal, "So are you going to help him or not?"

"Even though having a bullet lodged inside of him, your friend is lucky. It seems like the bullet missed any vital organs. However, I can't do anything here," Angel admitted. "We're going to have to go back to my headquarters."

"For Prime's sake! Why the fuck would we follow you anywhere?" Tommy questioned.

"I am not operating on the roof of a school. It's either my headquarters or your friend bleeds out."

What was up with people giving the worst options ever recently? Why couldn't one of the options be Tommy gets to take a fucking nap?

"Whatever, but if you or any of your weird mates even make one wrong move, I won't hesitate to shoot any of you into space," Tommy threatened.

"Fair enough," Angel nodded.

"I'm fine with going to space, as long as it's not the hospital," Ranboo slurred.

One, two, three, less – the familiar cold air cut into his face– *four, five, six, more* – the gravel crunched under his shoes as kept focused on the back wings that guided him (or maybe it was the purple cloak that flapped in the wind)- *one, two, three, less* – the nostalgia of flying across buildings snuck into his chest, somehow calming the nerves that were making his mind buzz. However, as much as Tommy enjoyed the whistling in his ears again, the reason why he had come back to it made his mouth go dry.

One of his friends was bleeding out and an evil cult possessed the other. This was no time to notice how the stars twinkled in the evening sky. He ignored the warmth that flooded his body as he floated between buildings. He needed to focus on keeping Ranboo alive. After that then they could focus on getting Tubbo back. Tubbo. ~~The same Tubbo who shot~~

Suddenly he watched Angel descend towards a random building in the distance. Tommy quickened his pace, aiming for the alley that the winged criminal had just dove into. He dropped down and hit the ground with a *crack* right before Angel who landed without a sound. Tommy turned to face the criminal and let out a soft sigh seeing Ranboo breathing softly in Angel's arms.

"If this is a fucking trap, I will end you," Tommy stated as he ignored his heart pounding against his chest.

The alley they stood in was the same as any other alley in the city. Moonlight eased in from above, illuminating the brick walls surrounding them. Tommy watched as Angel turned to the metal door to the left and entered a code into the PIN pad. The door let out a small beep and he pushed the door open.

Angel turned back to Tommy with his eye raised and replied, "I'm surprised that *you* think this is a trap when *I'm* the one bringing the Number One Hero's sidekick into my secret hideout. Shockwave is going to be pissed."

Tommy frowned at the name of the criminal's partner before replying, "Shockwave's a little bitch anyways."

Angel let out a soft chuckle before leading Tommy through the door. Tommy almost knocked his head on a lightbulb that hung over a set of stairs. A few months ago Tommy's gut would have told him to run in the other direction if he was being led down a flight of stairs by a criminal he'd only spoken to a handful of times. Honestly, that was what his gut was telling him now.

Out of the corner of his eye, Tommy watched Angel gently cup Ranboo's head to keep him from bumping the sidewall. Tommy gritted his teeth and began to climb down the stairs. This wasn't about him.

Now when Angel had first mentioned a headquarters, Tommy's mind had immediately been drawn to the images of giant tech-filled laboratories from his comic books and his experiences at the Heroes' Headquarters. However, what he was not expecting was to be led into an unfinished basement.

Surrounded by concrete walls, wooden beams, various storage boxes, and plastic lawn chairs, Tommy huffed, “Your secret hideout is shit.”

Angel shrugged and sheepishly admitted, “It’s under renovation.”

Tommy crossed his arms, “I’m seriously doubting if this was better than the roof.”

“Listen, Vigilante,” Angel’s blue eyes fell on him, making Tommy alert, “I promised I would help Ender. So let me help him, okay?”

Tommy hesitated as he found himself rubbing the scars on his palms again. He balled his hands into fists and focused on his roommate’s black and white mask. He hated this so much.

“Fine,” he replied in a dry tone.

“Alright, I’m going to take Ender into the other room now,” Angel went on, gesturing toward the door behind him, “you can stay—”

“What?” Tommy interrupted. “I’m not staying here while you do Prime’s knows what to him!”

Angel raised his eyebrows. “Oh, I didn’t know that you knew how to remove a bullet safely!”

“Well, I don’t know how to do that exactly…” Tommy trailed off.

Angel dropped his faux-surprised look. “Yeah, that’s what I thought. You want to help Ender, correct?”

Tommy reluctantly answered, “Yes.”

“Then the best way for you to help is to stay here and be patient. I can complete the procedure quickly if I don’t have any distractions.”

Tommy wasn’t enjoying the gentle-parenting energy that was radiating off of Angel.

“But—”

“No but’s. Sit down and rest. It seems like you had a rough day too,” He glanced down at Tommy’s wrists. The bruises were now an ugly green and purple combination. Angel continued, “There’s some healing gel in the cabinets in the bathroom down the hallway behind you.”

Tommy watched silently as Angel pushed open the door to the other room and disappeared.

And just like that he was alone.

~~Just like how he had left Tubbo alone.~~

Tommy took a deep breath in to try to relieve the anxiety that had collected in his shoulders, but it was no use. He looked down to find himself absentmindedly picking at the dry blood under his fingernails. Even though he knew it wasn't his, that didn't stop nausea from creeping up his throat.

Tommy quickly made his way to the bathroom that Angel had mentioned and shoved his hands into the sink. He turned on the faucet and began to scrub as hard as he could. He doused his hands in soap, trying to ensure that every speck of red was gone as fast as possible. He just needed to get it off and he would be fine. The blood didn't hurt. He wasn't even hurt. *He was the only one who didn't get hurt.* He was fine. He had to be fine.

After sufficient scrubbing, he cupped some water and splashed his face. He didn't have time to allow the exhaustion to seep into his joints. He grabbed a towel, wincing as he used his wrists.

As he patted himself dry, he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror and paused.

He looked like shit.

Even with his mask on, the signs of fatigue were evident. His skin was pale and slick, his hair was a rat's nest, and bruises scattered over his face. This wasn't the vigilante that went out and cleaned up the heroes' messes. This wasn't even Tommy.

Tubbo's red eyes bore into him, "You are even less than special. Even with superpowers you somehow find a way to fuck up every single part of your life."

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut. It didn't matter who he was. Not right now.

He grabbed a vial of healing gel out of the cabinet and pushed open the bathroom door, but froze at the sound of a familiar voice.

"—bring them here? Including the sidekick?" Shockwave's voice said at the end of the hallway.

"He was the one that was shot. I couldn't let him bleed out there," Angel replied.

"We are currently wanted for murder! And you brought the Number One Hero's sidekick to our basement!"

Tommy knew this wasn't a hideout. Angel was just dramatic.

Angel's voice went somber, "I didn't have a choice. You didn't see Tommy. He wasn't doing well."

Tommy's heart jumped into his throat. Fuck. Even though he knew the Syndicate knew his name, it didn't make it any less freaky when they referred to him by his real name.

Why the fuck do they care so much about how I look? Tommy thought.

Shockwave let out a sigh before continuing, “Just finish with the sidekick so they can leave. I bet he wants to get out of here as soon as possible.”

A few beats of silence passed before the sound of a door opening and closing came down the hallway. Tommy let out his breath, hoping that the two criminals had finally left.

“Just a reminder that I can hear you breathing,” Shockwave announced loudly.

“Fuck!” Tommy jumped, almost dropping the healing gel. *What a fucking creep* , he thought.

Shockwave’s head poked into the hallway, his red goggles reflecting in the soft light. “I would apologize, but I don’t think you’d forgive me anyways,” He shrugged before retreating where he came from.

Tommy crossed his arms and exited the hallway to find Shockwave leaning against the stairs. As much as Tommy wanted to curse out the asswipe for scaring him, he kept his mouth shut as he sat down on a chair. He locked his eyes on the door of the room where Ranboo was and ignored the glorified massage chair.

He rolled the healing gel bottle between his fingers as he focused on the door. He needed to be ready the moment Ranboo was healed. Then they could get out of here and get–

“Angel wasn’t kidding, you look like shit,” Shockwave broke the silence.

Tommy frowned but didn’t dare to acknowledge Shockwave’s dig at him.

“Come on, Vigilante, don’t–”

Tommy snapped his head towards the criminal. “You don’t get to call me that anymore.”

Before Shockwave could reply, he focused on the door again and pressed his elbows into his thighs to keep them from shaking. Why wasn’t Angel done yet? They needed to leave.

After a few beats of silence, Shockwave’s stupid voice broke through, “Listen, I know last time we met up it wasn’t on the best terms.”

Your partner tried to kill me , Tommy thought as he kept his jaw clenched.

Shockwave continued, “But I’m glad to see you’re doing better. I can explain everything now if you–”

“No. Let me explain something to *you* ,” Tommy cut him off, his eyes still on the door. He had no desire to see Shockwave’s face. “Angel owed me a favor. Not you. Not Blade. Angel. I have no need for you. Just leave me alone so I can get this over with.”

“Oh... okay. I understand. I really just wanted to say sorry. For everything.”

Bullshit .

Suddenly, the door creaked open and Angel stepped out. Tommy shot to his feet, waiting for Ranboo to come after the criminal. Finally, they could leave this horrible place.

However, the door just shut with a click.

No Ranboo.

“I was able to remove—” Angel began, but Tommy’s blood began to pound in his ears.

“Where is Ender?” Tommy interrupted as his nails dug into his palms.

Angel replied, “He’s still in the room, but—”

Tommy didn’t wait to hear the rest of the sentence, he stormed past the winged villain and flung the door open. He needed to get Ranboo out of here. They needed to leave. He felt his breath quicken as heat crawled up into the back of his neck.

Ranboo was laying motionless on a surgery table surrounded by various towels and gauze covered in dark blood.

Tommy froze.

Blood. So much blood.

~~Just like when Blade almost killed him.~~

He gripped the doorframe, trying to get his vision to focus on Ranboo’s chest. Tommy needed to know if he was breathing. He had to be breathing. His eyes kept on going in and out of focus; just seeing blobs of purple and red.

~~Ranboo had lost so much blood.~~

Tommy slammed his hand into his chest, trying to get more oxygen in. He needed to see. He needed to know if Ranboo was breathing. Ranboo had to be breathing. Ranboo couldn’t die. He needed to say sorry. He needed Ranboo.

~~Ranboo was like this because of him. He did this to him.~~

His legs buckled out from beneath him as his knees slammed into the concrete floor. His head was spinning as his vision was filled with speckled darkness. His heart was slamming against his ribs. He needed to leave with Ranboo so they could save Tubbo. Someone gripped his shoulder.

~~Tommy left Tubbo. Tubbo was in trouble because of him.~~

They needed to save him. Tommy needed to save him. He was all alone. His blood was roaring in his ears. He didn’t have time for this.

~~This was all his fault.~~

He *needed* to breathe. *Breathe. Take a breath. Just Breathe.*

Why couldn't he breathe?

Suddenly a soft hum vibrated against his chest.

The calm drone quickly washed over his whole body, overcoming the harsh pain his body was in. Tommy closed his eyes as he leaned into it, allowing its warmth to spread and letting his heart slow with the murmur.

"Let the air in slowly," a calm voice called out. It was somehow far away and close at the same time. However, that didn't matter to Tommy, he just did as he was told. His lungs expanded as he enjoyed the soothing pulse.

"Good," the voice continued, "now let it out."

Again Tommy followed the instructions and the fog began to clear in his vision.

In...Out...In...Out...

"You're doing great, Tommy," The voice was much closer now, as if Tommy reached out he could touch the hum that coursed through his body.

Tommy blinked away the fuzziness in his eyes. His body was still leaning onto the buzz, but his mind began to wake up. He grasped onto the arm that was holding him up and looked up sleepily.

Red goggles looked down on him.

Fear shot through his body as he shoved the criminal and scrambled backward on the floor.

"What- what's happening? What did you do to me?" Tommy sputtered out, patting himself down.

Shockwave held his hands up and replied, "Nothing! You freaked out after seeing Ender and I was just helping you calm down."

"Oh..." Tommy trailed off. All he could remember was being worried about—

Tommy jumped up and yelped, "Ender! Is he okay?"

"He is fine," answered Angel as he stepped up next to Shockwave. "I *was* going to tell you I gave him a sedative to help with recovery before you blatantly ignored me."

Tommy sheepishly looked down. "Oh."

"Don't mind him," Shockwave said as he stuck his hand out toward Tommy. "We got a bit worried when you started hyperventilating."

Tommy ignored his hand and pushed himself up before replying, “Well, you don’t need to worry anymore. I’m fine.”

Shockwave and Angel exchanged looks, but Tommy didn’t care. They were just a bunch of strangers anyways. He would never have to speak to them again after this. He grabbed a chair from the main room and pulled open the door where Ranboo was.

Ranboo was in the same position Tommy had found him in earlier. However, now he was covered by a blanket and the towels and gauze were cleaned up. Tommy let out a soft sigh as he placed the chair next to Ranboo and sat down.

He frowned as he felt two pairs of eyes on the back of his head. Tommy kept his eyes on Ranboo’s rising and falling chest as he stated flatly, “I’m staying with him until he wakes up. I don’t need anything else from you. You can leave.”

“You should really lay—” Shockwave began, but Angel cut him off.

“That is fine. If you do need something, just let us know.”

“I won’t,” Tommy spat out. Ranboo’s chest went *up* . He had cashed in his favor, they had no reason to even offer. *Down* . He leaned forward and placed his chin in his palms. *Up* . The Syndicate was the least of his problems. *Down* . He didn’t care what he wanted. *Up* . He needed a way to save Tubbo. *Down* . And take down a giant fucking egg. *Up*.

Down.

Up.

Down .

—

“–UP? TOMMY?!” — screamed in his ear.

Tommy was wrenched up to his feet, —’s hand was squeezing Tommy’s arm so hard that it might lose circulation. However, that didn’t concern Tommy.

He gripped his head as a thousand voices screamed in his head. Whatever this was he wanted it out of his head.

The crimson vine that had just been wrapped around his leg slithered back into the sliver as a severed piece squirmed on the ground near his feet.

“What the fuck is it?” the man with white goggles asked as he pulled his arm back to attack the severed piece again with an axe.

“No! Don’t!” — said, grabbing the other man’s wrist. “We can study this!”

The man with white goggles lowered the axe and replied, “Whatever. As long as I don’t have to deal with it.”

Tommy’s eyes were wide as he watched the red vine convulse. He oddly felt bad for the plant. It was in pain. Tommy understood that feeling well.

“What did you do?” — snapped.

“I- I didn’t do anything, sir! I swear!” Tommy answered, his legs shaking again. He was still extremely weak from opening the sliver.

The blinding white line was slightly more open now, like a crack floating in the air. However, it still hummed with energy and stole the warmth from the room.

“Well, then how the hell did this thing come through? Did you touch the gate?”

“The gate?” Tommy bunched his eyebrows until it clicked, “Oh, the sliver! No, sir! I didn’t! It just started opening by itself!”

— let go of him and Tommy buckled to the floor. He immediately moved away from the vine that was now barely twitching. Whatever the fuck that was, Tommy had no desire to do anything with it, ever again.

“It started opening by itself,” — stated aloud, mystified. “That’s incredible. It not only generates its own power, but it can use that power as well.”

“A crack in our reality that can open on its own? Really —?” the goggled man grabbed — and turned — towards himself. “This shit could destroy our dimension! We need to close it. Now.”

— slapped his hand off his shoulder and replied, “We finally proved our theories! And you want to shut it down immediately? You’ve got to be joking!”

“Why the fuck would I be joking about the fabric of our reality? Tell the kid to close it.”

— turned his cloudy face towards Tommy. “Do not move,” he ordered.

Tommy rapidly nodded his head. He always listened to —. That was his job. To help — be the best hero he could be. Maybe one day Tommy could be a hero like —.

“We don’t know the consequences of opening it anyways! Something we’ve never seen before just came out of it and attacked the kid!”

“He’ll be fine. He’s strong,” — stated flatly. Tommy’s chest pulsed with pride. — continued, “Listen, I understand it’s a risk, but we’re about to change the world. It’s worth it.”

“I want to change the world, too, but we have to have a world that exists if we want to change it!”

“You’re being dramatic.”

“I’m not being dramatic! That this is an unstable energy siphon! Not to mention we don’t know what the hell could come out of—”

The crackling of electricity cut him off. All three of them twisted their heads towards the sliver. Tommy’s blood ran cold.

It was growing again.

“Tommy!” The goggled man screamed over the sound. “You need to close—”

Suddenly, a bright white light shot out of the sliver and hit the man with white goggles.

A flash of white light enveloped the room and Tommy’s eyes were forced closed. At the same time, a wave of energy threw him back, slamming him into the wall.

But just as quickly, the room went dark. There was no sound, no hum, no crackling anymore. The only sound that echoed through the laboratory walls was the panting of Tommy and —.

Then someone grabbed his arm and Tommy yelped loudly.

“It’s just me, Tommy. Are you okay?” — asked.

“Yeah, I’m okay. What even happened?” Tommy asked into the darkness where his mentor’s voice came from.

“It seems like the gate closed and in the process took out the electricity.”

Tommy glanced around as his vision adjusted to the darkness. — was right. The sliver was nowhere to be seen. It had closed all by itself.

Tommy sighed in relief. At least he didn’t have to close it.

“Wait,” —’s voice went cold. Tommy had never heard him speak like this. “Where’s George?”

He woke up to soft sounds murmuring beside him. He slowly blinked the drowsiness out of his vision and winced as he moved his stiff body upright.

“Hey, Vigilante!” An enthusiastic voice came from next to him.

Tommy turned to see Ender— oh yeah, Ranboo was Ender— looking at him. Even though half his face was covered, Tommy could tell he was smiling.

He was smiling. He was alive.

An overwhelming relief washed over Tommy so strongly that he almost fell out of his chair. Tommy grabbed onto his roommate, making sure he wasn't dreaming. His dreams lately had been feeling far too real.

"Ran—"

However, Ranboo cleared his throat loudly and nodded toward something on the other side of the room. Tommy turned to find Angel standing in the doorway, holding two water bottles.

"Oh um... *ran* dom color-wearing weirdo, Ender!" Tommy was amazing at improv. "Are you okay? How are you feeling?"

Ranboo let out a soft chuckle before replying, "I'm feeling much better. I don't really remember how I got here but Angel has been explaining a bit while you were asleep."

Tommy's eyes fell to the floor; embarrassment heating his face. "Fuck. I was sleeping when you woke up. I'm so sorry. You must've been so confused."

"You're fine, Vigilante. I only woke up a little while ago. Angel just came back with some water."

Tommy snapped his head towards the criminal, his eyes in slits. "I swear if you threatened him—"

"Hey!" Ranboo placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder. "He was very nice to me!"

Angel let out a soft laugh as he raised an eyebrow. "I'm still in awe at the fact that you're suspicious of us when you're literally with a guy who tried to arrest both of us."

"Sorry about that," Ranboo apologized sheepishly.

"Don't worry kid. I understand you were just doing your job," Angel shrugged before handing the water over. "So was I."

Tommy reluctantly took the bottle before gulping the whole thing down and then crushing the bottle in his hand. Angel and Ranboo looked at him with wide eyes.

"What? If Ender is better now, then we have no reason to stay here a second longer," Tommy announced.

"Hey Angel," Ranboo turned to the winged criminal. "Could you give us a few minutes?"

"Take as much time as you'd like," Angel nodded before exiting the room.

Tommy frowned at his roommate. "Why are you acting so buddy-buddy with him?"

"I'm not acting buddy-buddy! I'm being polite to the guy who saved my life," Ranboo replied. "Plus I thought you were friends with these guys?"

“I am not friends with a bunch of criminals! Why would you think that?”

“Because you asked them to help us? Or maybe it's the fact that the last time we all interacted you saved them?” Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Also I’m pretty sure you’re technically a criminal too.”

“I will have you know I am an *ex-vigilante*. I am nothing like them,” Tommy said as he crossed his arms and turned his face away.

“*Sure*, Tommy,” Ranboo answered. “Whatever you say.”

“Are you gaslighting me? I cannot believe this,” he threw his hands in the air.

“As much as I would love to engage in this conversation, I think we have something else we need to focus on,” Ranboo stated, his voice more serious now.

“There’s not much to discuss,” Tommy shrugged nonchalantly. For some reason, his shoulders were still aching. “Now that you’re better we can just go pop in and grab Tubbo and leave,”

“If you’re referring to me teleporting where Tubbo is, I can’t do that.”

“Why not? You found us before!”

“I need to know where someone is for me to teleport to them. We have no idea where Tubbo is! He could be anywhere at this point!”

“Fuck,” Tommy cursed as he sank back into his seat. “Well, there goes my main plan. What about you? Do you have an idea?”

“Well, when I was talking to Angel he seemed pretty intelligent... and I got the idea that maybe we could—”

Tommy shot to his feet, “No! We cannot trust the Syndicate!”

“We don’t have to trust them! We can just tell them the basics of the plan. They don’t need to know anything about Tubbo. We just need manpower. We can’t face the Egg alone.”

Tommy gritted his teeth. The fact was that Ranboo was right. The last time they had fought against the Egg they had barely made it out alive. They couldn’t just go back without a foolproof plan or they would end up like Tubbo.

Tommy crossed his arms and conceded, “Fine. But we only speak to Angel. Shockwave and Blade are off limits.”

“That’s fine with me,” Ranboo agreed.

Tommy walked to the door and paused before opening it. He turned back to his roommate. “You do know we’ll have to offer them something, right? Dream will be pissed if he finds out that you’re making deals with villains.”

A beat passed before Ranboo let out a sigh and answered, "If it saves Tubbo, I don't care what Dream does to me."

Tommy smirked. He couldn't have said it better himself. Well, maybe he would have called Dream an asswipe but that was just him.

He opened the door and saw Angel leaning against the staircase. Tommy raised an eyebrow and asked, "Were you just waiting for us?"

"Would *you* leave two strangers in your basement alone?" Angel replied.

"Aha! So you admit that this is your basement and not some fancy headquarters!"

Angel shrugged. "Headquarters, basement, basically the same thing. Look I'm a thief, not an interior designer."

"Maybe you should consider changing careers. This place needs help."

"You sound like Shockwave," Angel deadpanned.

"Don't compare me to that asshole!" Tommy snapped back.

"Hey! I heard that!" Shockwave yelled as he stomped down the staircase. He held two brown bags.

Tommy frowned. He just wanted to talk to Angel. However, he also knew that it didn't matter if Tommy took Angel to the other room, Shockwave would just eavesdrop on them anyways.

Tommy rolled his eyes before saying, "Ender and I want to talk to you guys about something."

"Uh okay?" Shockwave said before the two criminals followed Tommy back to where Ranboo was.

Ranboo sat up on the surgery table as the room filled up. "Oh, you guys didn't need to come in here I could've—" He started to say, but Shockwave interrupted him by placing a brown bag in his lap.

"We were going to come in and check on you guys anyway. Also nice to formally meet you, Ender. I'm Shockwave," the criminal with red goggles greeted.

"Nice to meet you too," Ranboo answered. "Sorry about the whole 'trying to arrest you' thing."

Shockwave laughed. "Oh don't worry. Lots of people try to arrest us. Just ask your friend over here," he said, gesturing at Tommy. He then held out a bag to Tommy. "It's a sandwich. I promise I didn't do anything to do it."

Tommy snatched the bag out of his hand and dropped it on the table next to Ranboo. "I don't really care, Shockwave. We have to ask you something."

“We’re listening,” Angel stated as he crossed his arms.

He rubbed his thumb along one of the scars on his palm as he continued, “ Well... I can’t say much, but we need your help.”

“Why can’t Ender just ask his mentor for help?” Shockwave asked, furrowing his eyebrows.

“I can’t ask Dream. Not for this,” Ender admitted.

Tommy continued, “Listen, we can both owe the Syndicate a favor, okay? Doesn’t it work like that?”

“Listen, Vigilante,” Angel spoke up. “When you called me earlier today and asked me for the healing gel, I came, no questions asked. I didn’t even push for an answer when you asked me to help the sidekick of the Number One hero. But you can’t just expect us to help you without some context.”

He knew they wouldn’t blindly follow two strangers. Angel probably broke every rule in the criminal handbook when he brought Tommy and Ranboo to his secret (but very normal-looking) basement. They had every right to be cautious.

Tommy sighed. “Fine. Have you heard of something called the Egg?”

Angel and Shockwave stiffened at the same time.

“What did you just say?” Shockwave asked, his voice going quiet.

Ranboo and Tommy exchanged a glance before Tommy answered, “Uh, the Egg? I guess I’m specifically referring to the Egg’s followers. They’ve formed this cult thing around the Egg and they have red—”

“Eyes. These followers have red eyes,” Angel finished, his face emotionless.

“Yeah...” Tommy raised an eyebrow. “I’m assuming you’ve heard of them?”

“Yes. We have heard of them. What do they have to do with you two?” Shockwave questioned. A flash of realization crossed the vibration-user’s face. “Please do not tell me you two fought followers of the Egg.”

Tommy let out a nervous laugh. “Well, you already know about my fight with one of them. You know the ice guy you saved me from? We got into another tussle. No big deal.”

“Is Ender getting shot considered a no big deal to you?” Angel inquired. Tommy could feel the gentle parenting energy radiating off of him again.

“But he’s fine now!” Tommy pushed back. “Thanks to you guys! Right, Ender?”

“Yeah! I’m all good now!” Ranboo chimed in. “We will do anything in return. We just need help getting someone out of their base. You guys won’t even need to fight!”

Shockwave and Angel exchanged a long look. They had a silent conversation as Tommy's gut twisted into a knot. Shockwave let out a deep sigh before turning back to them.

"I'm sorry, but we can't help you," Shockwave answered; his voice was somber.

Tommy felt his heart jump into his throat. No. This was their last resort.

"What if we pay you?" Ranboo sputtered out before Tommy. "You're thieves, right? How much to break into the Egg base? We will—"

"We can't help you because we can't fight the Egg cultists," Angel interrupted. "We can't win against them. They're too strong."

Shockwave shook his head slowly, avoiding eye contact. "You were there, Vigilante, the last time we tried to fight them."

Tommy was confused. When did he watch the Syndicate fight the Egg cult? The last fight Tommy saw was when Blade—

—when Blade killed the man with red eyes.

~~*The night when Blade almost killed him.*~~

"What are you talking about? I saw Blade win his fight!" Tommy protested.

"That wasn't Blade," Shockwave snapped back.

"What the fuck are you talking about? Of course, that was Blade! I got a real good look at him when he fucking attacked me!" Tommy's voice was now rising. This vague bullshit was starting to piss him off.

"Maybe if you fucking listened for once in your life, you would let us explain!" Shockwave retorted.

"Shockwave—" Angel warned.

"Blade did what?" Ranboo asked, completely out of the loop.

"You don't get to pull that shit on me!" Tommy was now shouting; his eyes digging into the red goggled asshole. "I went through hell and back because of your fucking partner!"

"We tried helping you! *You're* the one who left *us!*" Shockwave pointed out.

They were fucking cowards. Tommy didn't need them. He would save Tubbo all on his own if he needed to.

"Fuck you," He spat out, his voice dripping with disgust. Then he pushed past the criminals and headed towards the stairs. "Let's go, Ender. They're useless to us."

“Oh, okay,” Ranboo softly said. Before following Tommy out of the room, he turned towards the criminals and said, “It’s alright that you can’t help us. We understand. Thank you for the rest of your help. I mean it.”

Shockwave stepped forward, “Ender, you can’t fight them. Those people are like nothing you’ve faced before. You will lose.”

“I appreciate the concern, but we don’t really have a choice,” Ranboo replied honestly. “They have someone important to us.”

“But—”

“Ender!” Tommy shouted from the stairs. “We don’t have fucking time for this!”

“Thank you again,” Ranboo said before quickly following Tommy.

Neither of them looked back as the door to the basement slammed shut.

—

Tommy kicked a small rock and it rattled along the gravel road they had been walking on for the past 30 minutes.

He groaned loudly, “Why can’t we just do my plan?”

“Because your plan sucks!” Ranboo replied. “I am not letting you go to the Egg base alone!”

The moon was high in the sky now as the two roommates walked down an empty alleyway. They couldn’t go back to their dorm room since Tubbo had probably told the rest of the cultists that they lived there. And they couldn’t travel by rooftop or by the main road just in case another hero on patrol saw them and questioned why Dream’s sidekick was working with an infamous vigilante. So dark and dingy alleyway was their best bet.

“You would be there!” Tommy pointed out. “You would just be secretly following me!”

“Tommy,” Ranboo crossed his arms. “How do you think I got into the Egg base the first time?”

A few beats passed as the wheels turned in Tommy’s brain. Then it hit him. “You followed us? Why were you following us?”

“Because I saw an unknown man carrying my unconscious roommate while my other roommate just watched!” Ranboo answered in disbelief.

“Oooh. Alright. That’s valid.”

Ranboo rolled his eyes. “My point is that we need to figure out a way to get Tubbo alone. Or some sort of distraction.”

Tommy kicked the rock again and it skipped a few feet ahead of him. “At this point, I would rather just punch open a hole into their base, grab Tubbo, and run.”

“Can you punch a hole through a wall?”

“I once lifted a shipping container. Then I threw it at a wall and it broke.”

“That could work, but I didn’t see any shipping containers near their base.”

“Did you see anything I could throw else near their base? Like a dragon or something?”

“A dragon? Why would a dragon be at their base?”

Tommy grinned evilly. “Because then I can drag deez n—”

Someone loudly cleared their throat behind the two roommates.

Tommy and Ranboo immediately whipped their heads around and went into fighting stances. Tommy squinted into the darkness trying to see who had snuck up behind them. Was it a hero who recognized Ranboo? Maybe it was Dream. Tommy gritted his teeth, ready to fight. No matter who it was, Tommy would deal with them. He had more important things to do.

“Woah, sorry. I didn’t mean to sneak up on you,” a deep familiar voice came out from the shadows. Tommy’s blood turned to ice. Every hair on his body stood on its tip.

No. He could handle Dream. He could handle Shadow. He would even fight Punz again at this point.

But not him.

Anyone but *him* .

“What do you want?” Ranboo yelled out.

Shut up, shut up, Tommy’s mind was racing. He wanted to scream at Ranboo to run. They needed to get away from him. But Tommy’s body was paralyzed. It was as if he had returned to that night. ~~*The night he almost died.*~~

A large man dressed in dark combat clothing stepped forward. Half of his face was covered by a black mask and his head was covered by a hood. His long sword glinted in the moonlight. Tommy squeezed his fists even tighter, his scars were starting to scream.

It was Blade.

However, instead of his hands resting on his sword as Tommy had seen him before, Blade’s arms were stretched upwards, away from his weapons in surrender.

“I promise I am not here to fight you,” Blade stated. “I want to—”

“Sh-Shut up!” Tommy finally choked out. He could feel his whole body shaking. He couldn’t tell if it was fear or anger. “Don’t take another fucking step closer!”

“Tommy,” Ranboo whispered, concern etched in his eyes. “Are you okay?”

“He’s fucking dangerous. He’s the one who put me in the hospital,” He spat out, loud enough for the swordsman to hear. The desired result was immediate as Blade flinched at his words.

Ranboo gripped Tommy’s shoulder and asked, “Do you want me to teleport us away?”

“Wait! Please!” Blade pleaded. “I’m here to help you!”

“How the fuck could you ever help us?” Tommy seethed.

Blade let out a deep sigh. “I want to help you take down that stupid Egg.”

Chapter End Notes

hey y'all,,, happy 2023? Lolol I hope you all had a wonderful first month of the new year! Once again thank you for all the support on this fic, but please just remember to be respectful! I love writing this story but sometimes rude comments can be discouraging! Thank you again for all your comments and kudos!! I'm not joking when I say it brings me so much joy that you guys like the story this much!

I hope you have a lovely rest of your day/night! <3

Here are all the links to my various social medias! You can discuss and ask questions in any of these places!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #17: There's No Need for a Plan B (Probably)

Chapter Summary

Tommy and Ranboo attempt to execute their plan. Emphasis on 'attempt.'

Chapter Notes

Hi hi! Happy Valentines Day! my gift to you is 8k words of dialogue <3 I have a problem <3

tw // depiction of panic attacks and overstimulation

(also its atbash) (also also you don't notice my spelling and grammar errors because its valentines day <3)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy burst out laughing.

However, there was no joy in it. “Why the *fuck* would we believe you?”

Blade let out a sigh. “I’ll admit that you have no reason to believe me, but I promise I hate the Egg as much as you guys do.”

“You know *nothing* about us! Don’t act like you’re a good person, Blade. I know who— *what* you are,” a scowl was cemented on Tommy’s face. However, his legs were quivering. He didn’t know how long he could keep doing this.

“Vigilante, you have every right to ignore every word out of my mouth. But I can’t deny the fact that I owe you,” he paused, lowering his gaze. “You stopped me from hurting people that night. I don’t know how I can repay you.”

Tommy frowned. The villain’s words settled inside his chest in a familiar feeling. ~~*Was it the same feeling that arose whenever he thought of Tubbo?*~~ Tommy wished he could reach inside his chest, wrench them out, and crush them between his fingers. The last thing he wanted to do was understand the murderer.

But the truth was inevitable. Blade was admitting guilt.

“You can repay me by staying the fuck away from us,” Tommy answered, hate drenching his words. He then twisted around and began to walk away from the villain.

“Okay,” Blade replied softly from behind him. “I understand. I really am sorry. For everything.”

Just like his spineless partner. Nothing but bullshit.

“Let’s go, Ender. He’s just as useless as the rest of them,” Tommy said, not looking back.

“Well... um...” Ranboo stuttered. “I had a question for Mr. Blade. Is it okay if I call you Mr. Blade?”

“Blade is just fine, sidekick,” the villain answered.

“Ender, don’t fucking talk to him,” Tommy grabbed his roommate’s arm.

“I just have one question,” Ranboo said before turning his attention to Blade again. “I was just wondering, can you punch a hole through a wall?”

Blade blinked. Tommy furrowed his eyebrows in disbelief. The question hung in the air for a few seconds.

“Uh... I guess I could. I’ve never really tried,” Blade shrugged.

“Fuck off, Blade,” Tommy spat before pulling Ranboo to the side. He angrily whispered, “What the hell, Ranboo?! We don’t have time for this! Teleport us out of here!”

“Tommy, I don’t know your past with Blade and I want to respect your boundaries,” Ranboo replied, keeping his voice low. “However, I hate to say it, but a man with amazing fighting abilities just dropped in front of us and offered us help to save our friend. Shouldn’t we at least consider him an option?”

“No! He tried to kill me!”

“And you tried to send me into space, multiple times! Yet here we are!”

“That’s different and you know it!”

Ranboo shook his head. “Tommy, I’m being realistic. We need help. If we go in alone, who knows what will happen,” he dropped his head before softly stating, “I can’t lose you too.”

Tommy opened his mouth, but no words came out. He looked down and noticed Ranboo's hands clenched together, his knuckles white. A shard of guilt dug itself into his gut. He had been so focused on his hatred for Blade that he had forgotten what they had set out to do. At this moment, Tommy had one purpose. One goal.

“Tommy Innit, you are the biggest fucking hypocrite I have ever met. And I have met fucking Dream...” Tubbo’s voice was dripping with venom, “I am perfectly sound to know that you are selfish.”

And that goal had nothing to do with his fight with Blade.

He let out a sigh and began, “Okay, but we need to—”

CRASH

Tommy and Ranboo jumped at the loud sound. Their eyes went wide as they found the villain standing in a pile of rubble next to a hole in a brick wall.

“I can punch a hole in a wall, sidekick,” Blade declared loudly as he clapped the dust off his hands. “Do you have any other questions?”

“For Prime’s sake, Blade! What the hell?” Tommy yelled.

“He asked,” Blade replied, pointing at Ranboo.

Tommy turned to Ranboo with an annoyed look, but his roommate just shrugged. “I did ask.”

“Whatever, I don’t give a shit,” the ex-vigilante rolled his eyes before continuing, “Shockwave and Angel rejected our offer. How did you convince them to help us?”

“I didn’t. I’m the one that owes you a favor. They’re not involved with this.”

“I should’ve fucking guessed. Criminals don’t do shit without a reason,” Tommy seethed. He was surprised his faux-confidence was still intact. “And if we decided to let you work with us, how do we know you won’t freak the fuck out again and try to stab us?”

“I have it under control,” Blade stated flatly.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Shockwave said it wasn’t you that night. What the fuck does that mean? I saw you with my own fucking eyes.”

Blade slowly shook his head and tiredly answered, “Shockwave just says that. It’s still me. Just a different side of me...” He furrowed his eyebrows together, searching for the right words. “The short explanation is that my powers have a pretty lousy side effect.”

“That’s a fucking understatement,” Tommy scoffed before pressing on, “So how do we know you have it under control? We can’t have you fucking this up.”

“I get that you have doubts, but I promise I have it under control. The last time was an exception to the usual. They can’t surprise me this time.”

Suspicion continued to swirl in his head as he tried to think of more questions. But Tommy couldn’t deny the fact that Ranboo was right. They needed help.

Tommy let out a sigh of acceptance. “If we’re going to do this then I’m in charge.”

Blade shrugged. “Makes no difference to me.”

However, a confused look spread on Ranboo’s face, “Wait, does this mean—”

“Yep!” Tommy cut him off. “We’re doing the plan that Ender fucking hates!”

“What?!”

—

“This is the worst plan ever,” Ranboo stated flatly.

“Not like you had a better one,” Tommy replied.

“Still sucks,” Ranboo grumbled.

The two of them stood in front of a large warehouse. It stood alone in an empty lot surrounded by various construction sites in the distance. They had traveled to the edge of L’Manburg and the Badlands where Ranboo had seen Tubbo and Punz take Tommy. However, Ranboo had been caught before he could find an entrance.

“Maybe they moved since I found out where they were located?” Ranboo suggested.

“They just causally moved their giant underground base?” Tommy countered.

“I don’t know! It just doesn’t seem like anyone is here!”

Tommy frowned. If Ranboo had been wrong about this being the entrance to The Egg Cult’s base, then that would ruin their entire plan with Blade. On the other hand, Tommy also knew that he was the Egg’s precious ‘key.’

Tommy cleared his throat and then shouted, “HEY EGG BITCHES, THE KEY IS HERE! OPEN THE FUCK UP!”

Ranboo jumped in surprise as Tommy’s voice echoed throughout the abandoned lot.

“Tommy! What—”

CREEEAAAK

The large door of the warehouse began to slide up and fold into the darkness of the warehouse. Ranboo and Tommy exchanged a confused look.

Then a tall individual stepped into the moonlight and loudly declared, “Watch your language, Tommy Innit.”

“I’ll say whatever the fuck I want,” Tommy scoffed, recognizing the voice. “My business is with the Egg, not you, Shadow.”

The black-cloaked hero scowled, “I currently am the Egg’s messenger. Have you finally come to your senses and accepted the Egg?”

Tommy laughed, “Listen, I don’t work for free. I’m here to make a deal with the Egg.”

Shadow raised an eyebrow. “And what may that be?”

Tommy’s voice became serious. “I’ll accept the Egg, but only if the Egg lets Tubbo go.”

“Oh really? And what makes you think Tubbo wants to leave the Egg?”

“I don’t give a shit about what Tubbo wants. If the Egg wants the key,” Tommy pointed at his chest, “then it can’t have Tubbo. That’s my final offer.”

Shadow crossed his arms and paused. Tommy felt a hand grasp his shoulder and he resisted the urge to look at Ranboo. Instead, he gritted his teeth and continued to focus on the hero.

“The Egg has decided to take your offer, Tommy Innit,” Shadow finally stated. “Tubbo has served his role.”

Relief washed over Tommy and a smile spread across his face. “Fantastic! Let’s get this party on the road! Take us to him.”

However, Shadow raised his hand. “Just wait, Tommy Innit. I have accepted your offer. I still do not know why your friend—Ranboo, was it?— is here.”

“He’s here to make sure Tubbo makes it out,” the blonde declared. “I have no reason to trust that overgrown poultry will actually let Tubbo go after I accept the Egg. So until Ranboo leaves with Tubbo, I will continue resisting it. And that’s a fucking promise.”

“Language,” the hero scowled.

“You know what? We can just fucking leave! ” Tommy threw his hands up. Then his voice went dark, “But I swear to Prime the Egg will never see me again unless I come back to *smash it to fucking pieces* .”

The seconds felt like hours as the ex-vigilante and the hero stared daggers into one another. Tommy dug his nails into his palms to keep his hands from shaking.

Take the bluff. Take the bluff. Take the bluff, Tommy thought. *Take the fucking bluff.*

Then,

Shadow let out a sigh. He surrendered, “Fine. However, before they leave, you all must meet the Egg. This is the Egg’s condition to the deal.”

Fuck. Tommy didn’t know how Ranboo would react to the Egg. It seemed like he was able to resist it to a certain extent, but who knows for how long? Tommy couldn’t put his friend in danger like that. Not again.

“Now that’s not—”

“We accept,” Ranboo interrupted.

“Ranboo! What the hell?” Tommy protested.

“It’s just a visit. I’ll be fine,” Ranboo answered calmly.

Shadow loudly clapped his hands together, catching the roommates’ attention. He smiled as he stated, “Fantastic. The Egg is excited to meet you both. Let’s go get your friend.”

The hero then turned around and walked into the dark entrance. Tommy took a deep breath before turning to Ranboo. Even though his roommate still wore a mask, Tommy could clearly see his eyebrows furrowed in worry.

So Tommy helped him calm his nerves the best way he knew.

Tommy slammed his fist into Ranboo’s arm.

“What the heck!” Ranboo yelled.

Tommy replied with a soft smile, “Let’s go get him back from those motherfuckers.”

Still rubbing his arm, Ranboo nodded with a bit more confidence. And the two roommates stepped forward.

Just as Tommy touched the shadows a shiver ran through his body, making his hairs stand on its tips. One second he had been standing in the darkness, the next he was covered in warm orange lighting. He was now standing at the end of an extremely long hallway, oil lamps lining the walls. He took a few more steps and stumbled a bit before regaining his balance. He looked down to find the floor had become a downward slope. Shadow stood a few feet in front of the pair and waved them to enter.

“How the fuck did you guys even build this without anyone knowing?” Tommy asked.

The dark-cloaked hero chuckled, “We didn’t build anything. The Egg provides us with the resources we need. Also language.”

“That didn’t really answer my question,” Tommy grumbled and they continued down the hallway.

The further they went down the more vibrant the lamps became. The lights turned the cement walls and the metal doors of the hallway a warm red. In contrast to the light, the air had become stale and cold. Their footsteps bounced off the stone and reverberated along their path to the underground. A soft pulse began to annoyingly beat at the back of Tommy’s head.

Tommy leaned over to Ranboo and whispered, “These doors kind of look like prison cells.”

“Dream told me once about how before they built Pandora SuperMax, they used to have an underground prison system underneath the city. You don’t think...” Ranboo trailed off, realizing the meaning of his words.

Tommy stiffened. *Shit. They had just walked into a fucking prison.*

He shoved his hand into his pocket and felt around until something sharp poked him. His shoulders slightly relaxed, but the anxiety had already settled within his muscles. Blade would know where they were. Blade would come for them. Tommy just needed to repeat it until he believed it.

“What the fuck is this?” Tommy asked, holding up a small green crystal no bigger than his pinkie.

“It’s a tracker,” Blade answered as he attached a similar one to his belt. “It helps me keep track of Angel and Shockwave and vice versa. Once you get whatever—or whoever—you need, twist it and I’ll come to you.”

A smirk crawled across Tommy’s face. “Did you just give me a friendship crystal?”

“If it was a friendship crystal, I would have handed it to the sidekick,” Blade deadpanned.

“Oh fuck you!”

He will come. They will get Tubbo out. Nothing bad will happen. They had this all under control. Tommy had this under control. His plan would work. By any means necessary.

After passing at least 76 metal doors (Tommy had started counting a bit late) and making 4 left turns and 5 right turns (or was it the other way around?), Shadow finally stopped.

Tommy and Ranboo stumbled to stop themselves from running into the hero and shared a confused gaze. Tommy was the first to recover as he immediately asked, “What the f- eh- frick are you doing Shadow?”

Shadow turned towards them with a calm smile as he gestured at the door, “This has been Tubbo’s room for the past 24 hours.”

Heat instantly rose to Tommy’s face. “You’ve been keeping him in a cell?”

Shadow softly chuckled and Tommy resisted the urge to deck the bastard. “I wouldn’t call it that... It is a place where he could get reacquainted with the Egg. After the... *incident* yesterday, Tubbo was struggling so the Egg thought this was the best for him.”

“What the hell do you mean by struggling?” Tommy spat out, the rage boiling behind his chest now.

“Language, Tommy Innit,” Shadow corrected with a stern look before continuing, “The Egg is awaiting you three so why don’t you two simply go ask him yourselves.”

The hero clicked open the door and it swung open with a *BANG*. Tommy and Ranboo scrambled in, eyes wide searching for their friend.

Instead, they were met with a large concrete room. Red light enveloped the room in a warm haze, making Tommy squint his eyes to identify anything.

And then horror drenched his body in a cold sweat.

In the far right corner was a person with his knees to his chest, hands gripping his hair, and muttering softly.

“Tubbo!” Tommy screamed as he ran forward and fell to the floor next to his best friend.

“Oh no...” Ranboo gasped as he followed with visible pain etched on his face.

Tubbo didn’t react as the two approached him, staying in his huddled position. Tommy slowly reached forward and barely tapped his friend on the shoulder. Tubbo’s body fully recoiled at the touch, his head snapping up with wild eyes.

Tommy immediately held his hands up in defense as he softly said, “It’s just me, Tommy. We’re not going to hurt you.”

Tubbo’s eyes rapidly darted between Tommy and Ranboo before a look of realization fell on his face. His eyes were still wide as he slowly placed his hand on Tommy’s chest. Tommy put his hand over his best friend’s and continued, “I’m here, Tubbo.”

Tears welled up in Tubbo’s dazed eyes as he croaked out, “Y-you... you came back.”

“Of course, I came back. You’re my best friend.”

Tubbo pulled Tommy into a tight hug, tears wetting his shoulder. Through sobs, Tubbo mumbled, “The- The Egg s-said you left m-me and you were never coming back. It said that I had f-failed to p-protect you. It kept saying I d-deserved to be alone...s-saying that you h-hated me.”

Tommy pulled back so he could look Tubbo in the eyes. “I could never hate you.”

Tears continued to stream down Tubbo’s face as he nodded. He then squeezed Tommy’s hand before asking, “You’re staying this time, right?”

Tommy’s heart sank into his gut. He watched as Tubbo wiped his face with the back of his hands. Tubbo’s irises were still red.

He had been so relieved to see his best friend that he forgot that the Egg still had Tubbo in its control. He pushed down the nausea that came along with the thought. He couldn’t risk Tubbo exposing their plan by telling the truth.

Tommy smiled and carefully spoke, “Yeah, I’m planning to stay here.”

Tubbo’s face immediately lit up and turned to their other roommate, “You too, Ranboo?”

“Um... well...” Ranboo stuttered.

But Tommy had him covered as the blonde roommate interrupted, “Ranboo will be staying with you, Tubbo. Don’t worry.”

Tubbo let out a sigh of relief before a smile spread across his face. “The Egg promised that it would keep us all safe. We don’t need to fight anymore.”

“As long as you’re safe,” Tommy replied solemnly. The ache at the back of his head had now spread to the front, pounding at his temples.

Then someone loudly cleared their throat behind them. Tommy twisted with a scowl on his face as Shadow stood at the door with his arms crossed. What an impatient asshole.

“What does Shadow want?” Tubbo asked, worry in his eyebrows. “Are we in trouble?”

“No! Not at all!” Tommy answered. “Shadow came to tell us that the Egg wanted to see us.”

A look of surprise filled Tubbo’s face as he echoed, “Us?”

Shadow cleared his throat again and Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yep! But we have to go now! Can you stand?”

Tommy and Ranboo each took an arm and helped Tubbo to his feet. As Tubbo gained his bearings again, Tommy shot a glance at Ranboo. His other roommate had always been shy, but his recent silence made Tommy a bit wary.

“Hey, how are you holding up?” Tommy whispered.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me,” Ranboo replied. However, despite his words, Ranboo’s face was pale and slick with a layer of sweat. Tommy’s stomach twisted into a knot. They needed to finish this quickly.

The hero smiled as the three roommates walked up to the entrance. Shadow’s voice was friendly as he greeted, “I’m glad to see you’re doing well, Tubbo.”

“Thanks,” He shared a soft look with his roommates, “I’m doing much better now.”

The knot in his gut twisted tighter. Even though he didn’t know when the last time he ate was, Tommy resisted the desire to empty his stomach on Shadow’s shoes. Now that they had Tubbo they just needed him to snap out of it and then they could call Blade. Easy. Simple. No problem. There was no way this plan could go wrong.

“Can we just get on with this?” Tommy asked through a clenched jaw. His headache had now turned into a full-blown migraine.

“Right this way,” Shadow nodded before leading them down the hallway.

The path they took looked the same as before. As they walked deeper into the concrete maze, Tommy tried to remember the turns they took, but the beating in his skull greatly hindered his progress.

“You know,” Tubbo said as they walked, “I thought I was going to be nervous to meet the Egg, but I think I’m excited.”

“Me too,” Tommy lied with a smile.

“I’m just glad we get to do it together,” Tubbo went on, playfully nudging Tommy.

Tommy took a deep breath through his nose. Was it just him or did the air feel heavier down here? He continued, "Of course, Boss Man."

Tubbo then excitedly turned to their other roommate, "What about you, Ranboo? How are you feeling?"

"Huh? Wha- oh are you speaking to me?" Ranboo replied, startled. He didn't look much better than a few minutes ago. The dazed look in his eyes had started to get worse.

"Ranboo's super excited!" Tommy answered for him. "He's just so lost in his very excited thoughts!"

"Um- yeah! What Tommy said," Ranboo half-heartedly confirmed.

Slight confusion washed over Tubbo's face, but it was quickly replaced with a smile. He answered, "I'm just happy to see you guys getting along. See, the Egg really does bring people together!"

Tommy and Ranboo shared a glance before murmuring in agreement.

More like the Egg forces people together, Tommy thought.

"Oh, I was also wondering," Tubbo continued, "why are you guys still wearing your masks? Everyone here already knows who you guys are."

Now it was Tommy's turn to be startled, "Oh, well... um, that's because—"

Luckily, he was cut off by Shadow's annoying voice announcing, "Here we are! Are you ready?"

Tommy frowned as he answered, "Get on with it, Shadow."

"Now, no need to have an attitude, Tommy Innit. The Egg is very excited to see you again," Shadow replied as he pushed open a set of double doors.

Immediately, a wall of cold air slapped Tommy in the face. As he stepped into the room, a shiver ran down his spine. 'Room' was an understatement. The bright red vines dangling from above were the only indicator that there even was a roof. The walls were lined with dozens of warm-toned torches, the fires from each flickering a dizzying light pattern on the red roots that spread along the floor. His whole body tensed up as his eyes trailed along them to see where they stemmed.

Sitting in the middle of the cavern was a giant, glowing, blood-colored egg.

A sharp pain cut through his head and suddenly the pounding in his ears became worse. Tommy squeezed his eyes shut trying to control the ache. But then he realized something. The pounding wasn't coming from his head.

It was the Egg.

It had a heartbeat.

And it was beating inside his mind.

“Shit,” Tommy whispered under his breath. He stuck his hand into his pocket and gripped the tracker crystal.

“The Egg is pleased to have you here,” Shadow said, his voice almost making Tommy jump in surprise.

“I don’t give a shit anymore, Shadow,” Tommy spat out. He tightened his grasp on the crystal, hoping the pain would distract him from the pulse. “Tell the stupid Egg to let Tubbo go.”

“What are you talking about?” Tubbo asked behind him, but Tommy ignored him. He had a job to do.

“Oh, did Tommy not tell you?” Shadow asked, turning his attention toward the brunette.

“This is between me and the Egg!” Tommy shouted. “He has no say in this!”

“Tell me what?” Tubbo asked, worry filling his face.

“Well, Tommy has asked the Egg for a trade,” Shadow continued, pity soaking his words.

Tubbo frowned. “What kind of trade?”

Tommy attempted to cut in, “It doesn’t matter!” He then twisted toward the Egg and shouted, “We fulfilled the condition! We met! Now let him go!”

Then Shadow placed a hand on Tommy’s shoulder, making him go still. The hero ignored his pleas and continued to address his roommate, “Tommy has decided to stay with us, but in return, you must leave with your friend, Ranboo.”

Horror flashed across Tubbo’s face. He whipped his head between his roommates. He gasped, “No... you said...”

Ranboo reached forward with sweat making his hair stick to his forehead. His voice was quiet as he started, “Tubbo, just give us a min—”

Tubbo slapped his hand away as he shouted, “No! No, that can’t be true! Tommy said we would be doing this together!” Pain filled his eyes. “You can’t leave me again! I thought we were friends!”

His best friend’s words shot out like splinters and buried themselves into Tommy’s heart. Tommy could barely keep his thoughts in order as black spots started to fill his vision. The pulsating was only getting worse and worse by the second. They couldn’t stay here any longer. They needed to leave.

Tommy wrenched himself out of Shadow's grip and yelled, “Ranboo! Get him out of here!”

Ranboo furrowed his eyebrows as he croaked out, “What? I’m not–”

Shadow’s laugh echoed throughout the cavern. The three of them spun to see Shadow standing at the only exit surrounded by 5 other men. A large smile formed on the hero’s face, but there was no kindness in it. “Did you really think we were going to let them go, Tommy?”

“You fucking–”

“Language, Tommy Innit. I am losing my patience with you. You’re lucky the Egg still has some for you.”

“You are all batshit crazy!” Tommy shouted. He pulled the crystal out of his pocket and attempted to twist it as Blade instructed.

However, the black spots in his vision had begun to make everything hazy. This couldn’t be happening right now. Over and over again he tried to twist it, but his fingers were far too shaky. He couldn’t control them. He needed to focus. His heartbeat—or the Egg, he couldn’t tell the difference anymore— was slamming against his eardrums. It didn’t matter. Nothing else mattered. He needed his fingers to just grip the crystal. *Why couldn’t his fingers just—*

The crystal slipped. It clinked as it hit the ground and started to roll away. Tommy tried to run after it, but his body had been set to slow motion.

And then,

crunch.

He watched in horror as Shadow lifted his boot to reveal thousands of green shards. A sick smirk framed his face as he said, “Oh, I’m sorry. Did you need that?”

Tommy moved without thinking, spinning towards his friends. They needed to do something else— *anything else* —and Tommy began to shout, “RAN–” but his voice stopped in his throat.

Ranboo was hunched over on the floor, his hands gripping his ears. His back was moving sporadically up and down. Beside him, Tubbo attempted to console him, saying calmly, “If you just accept the Egg, it will hurt much less. I promise, Ranboo. You need to just let it in.”

Tommy opened his mouth to try to call his roommates again, but Shadow spoke first, “The Egg has always known your true intentions, Tommy Innit. Your plan was meant to fail from the start.”

Tommy felt his knees begin to shake as he clenched his teeth together. He couldn’t tell if it was from anger or pain. His thoughts were starting to get muddled between the drumming within his skull. No. Shadow was wrong. He had to be wrong. Their plan was supposed to work. It was supposed to be simple. Blade was supposed to find them. He was supposed to save his friends.

The hero continued, “You cannot resist destiny. Just accept your faith and the Egg will give you everything you desire.”

“The Egg knows nothing about me!” Tommy hissed.

“Of course, the Egg knows you. *You’re the one who brought it here.*”

Suddenly everything went silent. Even the pounding had stopped.

“What did you say?” His voice was barely a whisper.

“Why do you think you’re called ‘the key,’ Tommy? You’re the one who opened the gate to allow the Egg to come to our dimension.”

Key.

Gate.

Tommy took a step back, but his heel caught on a root and he stumbled to the ground. His whole body throbbed in pain as his mind went numb. Something felt wrong with him. ~~This was all his fault.~~ Shadow was crazy. Tommy had never met the Egg. ~~He brought it here.~~ Everything felt wrong.

“T-that’s not true,” Tommy trembled. It couldn’t be true. Tommy couldn’t even do that kind of stuff. He gripped his hair as a sense of déjà vu washed over him. No. This wasn’t real. This wasn’t real. It was just a dream.

And then,

a hundred voices stacked on top of each other flooded Tommy’s head.

RG RH GIFV echoed the voices. **BLF ZIV GSV PVB GL GSV TZGVH LU ZOO DLIOWH.**

“Shut up! You’re not real!” Tommy tried to scream, but the words scratched along his throat.

ZXXVKG BLFI WVGHRMB. BLF ML OLMTVI XZM IVHRHG.

Tommy squeezed his palms as hard against his ears. The voices just continued to reverberate inside his skull, banging against the sides. It was too much. Everything was too much. He was heaving, trying to get air into his lungs, but it wasn’t working. Nothing was working. *Why wasn’t it working?*

He choked out, “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I didn’t do anything! I was just doing what he told me to do!”

GSV KLDVI DRGSRM BLF RH HGILMT. BLF NFHG HGLK SLOWRMT RG YZXP. OVG NV HSLD BLF DSZG SV GLLP UILN BLF.

His whole body was shaking as he pressed his forehead into the cold concrete. The voices were so loud that each word felt like it was tunneling through his head into his brain. He clawed at the ground trying to feel anything besides the voices. Tommy wanted them to stop. Everything was wrong. Everything was hurting.

“Please stop,” He whimpered softly. “It wasn’t my fault.”

**QLRM FH GLNNB RMMRG. UFOUROO BLFI W VHGRMB. R DROO SVOK BLF
NZPV GSRH DLIOW YVGGVI ULI ZOO.**

He wasn’t supposed to say yes. He wasn’t supposed to accept. Tommy knew better. ~~He was only supposed to listen to one person. He had always done what he had been told. But he wasn’t here. Why wasn’t he with Tommy anymore? Why wasn’t he here?~~ Tommy just wanted it to stop. He wanted the voices to stop. He wanted the pain to stop. He wanted the pulse to stop. He wanted everything to stop. ~~Where was he? He left him. Tommy wasn’t good enough for him. Tommy had made a mistake.~~

Something snapped inside of him. His brain felt like it was strangled, twisted, and squeezed from every direction possible. His whole body was shaking, paralyzed by the realization: no one was coming. They all had left him. ~~He left him. He left him. He left him because of the mistake. Tommy would fix his mistake. He would never make another mistake again.~~

This Egg couldn’t do anything for him. ~~It was defeated by an axe.~~ This Egg was weak. The Egg was a mistake.

ML. WL MLG TL ZHGIZB. HGZB DRGS FH.

But Tommy wasn’t weak. He was strong. ~~He needed to fix his mistake. If he was strong enough to bring it here then he was strong enough to send it back.~~ He was strong enough to resist the Egg. Strong enough to destroy the Egg. ~~**He was strong enough to destroy everything. If he wanted everything to stop, then he would stop everything. Nothing was worth this. He was not worth this. Tommy would fix his mistake by starting over. He would make everything start over. Everyone needed to start ov—**~~

CRASH!

Tommy snapped his head up, instantly breaking out of the haze. His eyes were wide as he watched bricks fly across the room and hit the opposite wall. Out of the dust cloud surrounding the giant hole in the wall came a large man with dark-colored clothing and a long sword.

It was Blade.

“I underestimated how many walls I needed to punch,” he deadpanned.

Tommy just stared in shock. Was he just imagining this? Was the egg deceiving him with an illusion? Was this a dream before his mind was taken over by a giant glowing weed?

“Stop right there!” Shadow shouted from across the room.

Blade rolled his eyes before briefly turning to the blonde and stating, “I’ll be right back.”

Tommy was mystified as Blade ran directly toward the hero. Shadow tried to fight the criminal, but Blade sliced through the air, dodging every attack thrown his way. Tommy felt dizzy watching Blade twist and turn through the grips of the six men. It was clear that Blade

was a much more skilled fighter than any of them. It wasn't long before five men lay unconscious on the floor.

"Why won't you just stay still?!" Shadow shouted as he launched another strike. However, Blade simply whipped past the hero and slammed the butt of his sword into Shadow's head. The hero crumpled to the floor in an unconscious heap.

"That's my line," Blade replied, "but I usually save it for a certain vigilante."

The criminal then made his way to the door and stuck his sword in the handles, locking the door. He dusted his hands on his pants as he walked up to Tommy nonchalantly as if the man hadn't just taken down five men plus a hero on his own.

"You good?" He asked flatly, sticking his hand out for Tommy to grab.

"Th—the crystal... it broke... how..." Tommy sputtered out, but his brain was still trying to catch up with reality.

"The crystals have a fail-safe. The moment it broke, it sent out your last location," Blade explained. "I wasn't surprised that you broke it though, you tend to randomly throw things."

"I thought you weren't coming," Tommy admitted, his voice quivering. He wasn't awake enough to filter his thoughts yet. The words were just pouring out. "I thought you left us."

Blade lowered himself to his knees and gently placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder. A wave of relief washed over him as he felt Blade's hand make contact with his shoulder. He was real. This was real. Blade was really here.

Blade let out a soft sigh. "I promised I would help you and your friends and I always fulfill my promises."

Tommy clenched his jaw to keep his eyes from stinging. He dropped his head, breaking away from the eye contact. His anxiety should have been sky-high when seeing the man that almost killed him. His face should be burning with hate. His skin should be crawling with fear.

But Tommy felt none of that.

Instead, he gripped the criminal's forearm and whispered, "Thank you."

"Don't thank me just yet," Blade continued as he helped Tommy up to shaky legs, "we still need to get out of here. Where are your friends?"

Tommy weakly pointed over to where his roommates resided. Both were staring at the criminal with wide eyes, deciding if this was real life or not. However, once Blade began to walk over, it was Tubbo who broke out of the shock first. He jumped in front of Ranboo and yelled, "Stay away! We will fight back if we need to! The Egg will make you pay!"

"Tubbo," Ranboo's voice was barely detectable as he spoke. The sidekick was struggling to keep his head up, but the daze in his eyes had cleared up significantly. "He's here to help."

“We don’t need help! The Egg will send help!” Tubbo shouted back as he stared daggers at the criminal.

Blade held his hands up in defense and raised his eyebrow at Tommy as he whispered, “He doesn’t seem like he wants to be saved.”

“I promise he does,” Tommy replied earnestly. His adrenaline had completely worn off now and the fatigue had spread through his entire body. “The Egg is fucking with his head. We just need to get him out of here.”

Blade nodded in understanding. Then in one swift movement, he grabbed Tubbo and planted him on his shoulder. Tubbo immediately started to beat his fists into the criminal’s back.

“Put me the fuck down!” Tubbo shouted in defiance.

“Hey sidekick, are you alright?” Blade asked, ignoring the screaming teenager.

Ranboo nodded slowly as he rubbed his temples. He softly answered, “That really sucked.”

As Blade helped Ranboo up to his feet, he gripped the criminal, attempting to regain his balance. Tommy was a few steps away as he watched his best friends get help. They were so close to leaving this horrible place and never looking back.

Tommy then looked down at his hands. His fingers were bloody from scrapping at the concrete from earlier. He hadn’t even noticed. He slightly moved them as a cold numbness began to travel down his hands. The uncomfortable feeling of deja vu greeted him again. He had done this, hadn’t he? He had brought the Egg here.

He didn’t know what it had to do with the horrible dreams from the past few months, but the answer was clear. Tommy had done this. He had made another mistake.

He let out a deep sigh and looked back at Blade. His voice was serious as he asked, “You said that you always keep your promises, right?”

Blade furrowed his eyebrows as he brought his attention to the ex-vigilante. “Yes, I did say that.”

“Will you please promise that you’ll keep my friends safe?”

“Vigilante—”

“Blade!” Tommy cut him off. He didn’t have time for this. He needed his friends out of there so he could fix his mistake. “You fucking owe me. So you need to fucking promise me that you will keep them safe.”

“Okay! I will!” Blade conceded. “But where’s this coming from?”

Tommy glanced back at the Egg. With each passing second, its influence was getting stronger and stronger. Tubbo was still yelling profanities and Ranboo was leaning against the criminal with his eyes squeezed tight. They didn’t deserve this. They were supposed to be far away

from it. Tubbo was supposed to be happily working at his dream job. Ranboo was supposed to be grabbing Dream coffees and stopping petty thieves. But here they were. Suffering. Because of his mistake.

“You need to leave, Blade. I’m staying.”

“Vigilante, you can’t—”

“I don’t have a choice!” Tommy snapped back as he gripped his hair. Any relief he had felt was once again replaced with stress. “You don’t get it, Blade! I’m the only one who can stop it! I have to do this or more people will get hurt! This is all my fault and I need to—”

Suddenly a fist gripped the front of his hoodie. Tommy’s eyes were wide as Blade was face to face with him. Contrasting their position, Blade calmly asked, “Why did you come here?”

“What?” Tommy breathed.

“Why did you come here, Vigilante?”

“To save my friend.”

“And did you do that?”

Tommy hesitated. He glanced at Tubbo who was slowly losing steam as he clawed at Blade’s arm that held him in place. However, the hate in his red eyes was still clear.

“No,” Tommy admitted.

Blade let go of his hoodie and flatly replied, “Then finish the job before you take on another.”

“But what about—”

“You need to take it one step at a time, Vigilante.”

Shit, Tommy thought. I need to get it the fuck together. First, I need to help Tubbo. Then I’ll deal with this stupid fucking Egg.

Tommy let out a sigh. He then replied, “Okay. Let’s just get out of this hell hole.”

Blade grunted in agreement before facing Ranboo again. “How are you feeling now? Are you good to teleport?”

“What the hell, Blade? You’re going to make him teleport?” Tommy frowned.

“It’s okay,” Ranboo reassured him. Tommy noticed that the color had begun to come back to his face. “I can do it. It’s the fastest way out of here.”

“Also you two are in no shape to climb 50 feet out of a hole,” Blade added.

“I am perfectly fine!” Tommy countered. However, as he took a step forward, his left knee gave out. Just before his face smashed into the concrete, Blade grabbed the back of his hoodie.

Blade lifted Tommy to his feet again before stating, “You and I share very different definitions of ‘fine.’”

Tommy rolled his eyes as Ranboo placed a hand on his shoulder and the other on Blade. The blonde then sneered, “You can share deez n—”

“I think we should leave him. What do you think, sidekick?”

“Fuck off!”

—

The four of them slammed into the ground in a flurry of purple particles.

“What the hell, Ender?!” Tommy groaned.

“Sorry,” Ranboo apologized. “I’m still kind of out of it.”

As Tommy pushed himself to his feet, every inch of his body ached. He turned his head to find himself in another dingy alleyway. Fan-fucking-tastic. Both buildings had significant construction, one of which was simply the skeleton of a building along with scaffolding shaking in the morning wind. The sky had begun to brighten up and the figures of the others were becoming more recognizable.

One particular short figure attempted to shove another larger figure and yelled, “Get the fuck off of me!”

However, the larger figure— Blade— grabbed the shorter figure—Tubbo— with two hands, pinning his arms down and lifting him. “I’m sorry,” he said before turning towards Tommy and asking, “So what do you want to do with him? He still seems mad.”

“Fuck you! Tommy! Tell him to let me go!” Tubbo continued angrily.

Tommy winced at the use of his real name, but he had bigger problems. Tubbo didn’t seem like he was snapping out of it. He shared a worried glance with Ranboo. This wasn’t a good sign.

“Boss man, you need to calm down,” Tommy replied with his hands up.

“Why the fuck would I calm down?! A fucking murderer is holding me hostage!”

“He has a valid concern,” Blade pointed out.

“Shut up!” Tommy snapped at the criminal. Then he turned back to his best friend, “If you calm down, then we can help you.”

“I don’t need help! I was happy with the Egg! You’re ruining my fucking life!” Tubbo spat out, detest drenching his voice. The alley had started to fill with daylight and Tommy's heart dropped as he looked into his best friend’s eyes. They were still red.

“Shit,” Tommy cursed under his breath as he turned away. “I thought getting him out of there would break the connection.”

“Maybe we need to just wait it out?” Ranboo suggested.

“Hate to break it to you, but we are currently being hunted by a giant fucking cult of possessed heroes and criminals. Waiting really isn’t something we have time for,” Tommy replied.

Suddenly, Tubbo started screaming, “HELP! I NEED HELP! I’VE BEEN KIDNAP—”

The two of them twisted around with wide eyes. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* Tommy ran forward and slapped his hand over his friend’s mouth. He hissed, “What the hell?”

Then he felt his hand become wet. Tommy flung his hand back in disgust and yelped, “Did you just fucking lick me?!”

“Let. Me. Go,” Tubbo ordered. “Or I will scream again. Sooner or later a hero will come to save me.”

“Don’t you fucking dare—”

“HELP! SOMEONE HELP ME—”

His words were immediately muffled by Blade’s hand. If Tubbo had attempted to lick his hand, it seemed like it didn’t phase the criminal. Tommy pressed the bridge of his nose, trying to soothe the anxiety that had settled in his sinuses. At this point, his body was just finding random parts to hurt just to annoy him.

“Fuck!” Tommy cursed in frustration. He wracked his brain for a solution, but it was no help. They didn’t have much time before the city would be fully awake again. Then the cult wouldn’t be the only thing they would have to worry about.

“Any ideas?” Tommy finally asked after a few beats of silence.

“I know you’ll hate it,” Ranboo answered sheepishly, “but maybe we should just go to the heroes.”

“Shadow is literally a hero! Who knows what other heroes are a part of the fucking cult!” Tommy snapped back.

“What are we supposed to do?” Ranboo replied, echoing his tone. “Just hide until we’re inevitably found? We can’t do this alone!”

“We’re not alone! Blade is here!” Tommy stuck his finger at the swordsman.

“He is *one* man! We barely escaped that place! We need more help!”

“He beat up six people! He’s more than enough!”

“And how’s that supposed to help Tu—erm—our friend?! Is Blade supposed to beat the Egg out of him?”

“Do you want me to try that?” Blade chimed in.

“No!” Tommy and Ranboo yelled at the same time.

A few beats passed as an awkward silence passed through the alleyway. The flapping of tarps and creaking of beams filled the air between the vigilante, the sidekick, the criminal, and the accidental hostage.

Blade was the one to break the quiet as he softly asked, “So do you want me to keep on holding this kid or...?”

“Yes! No! Ugh! I don’t know!” Tommy threw his hands up in defeat. “I don’t know what the fuck we’re supposed to be doing! This is a fucking shit show.”

“No kidding. You guys look fucking terrible,” A new voice entered the conversation. Tommy whipped his head around to see a figure standing at the end of the alley. The rising sunshine glinted in his red goggles.

Fuck.

Tommy snapped his attention towards Blade. “You said that Shockwave and Angel weren’t involved!”

“We weren’t,” Shockwave answered for his partner. Tommy frowned as the criminal continued, “However, Blade forgot that when a tracker crystal sends out an alert, all remaining crystals receive it.”

“Oh, yeah...” Blade admitted, avoiding Tommy’s glare. “My bad.”

“But our tracker didn’t break here,” Ranboo pointed out. “So how did you find us?”

Shockwave crossed his arms as he walked up. “Blade still has his tracker, dumbasses.”

“Oh,” Ranboo answered.

“For fucks sake!” Tommy cursed.

“Sorry,” Blade apologized. “My hands were a bit full.”

Tubbo began to squirm in the swordsman’s grip, his curses continued to be muffled by a hand. Tommy clenched his jaw as he shifted his gaze between his best friend and the red-

goggled criminal. He was not in the mood for a lecture about how they had fucked up from a know-it-all prick.

As the criminal came up, he started, “Prime, what the fuck was so important that you needed to risk—”

But then,

Shockwave froze in place, his vision set on the restrained teenager.

“We didn’t kidnap him!” Tommy defended. “We were saving him!”

His best friend grunted in disagreement, but neither of these actions made a difference to Shockwave. He made no comment as he pursed his lips into a tight line.

Ranboo turned towards Blade with a confused look, “Does he have something against kidnapping people or something?”

“Uh... not usually,” Blade shrugged. “But then again we usually just take heist jobs.”

“We did not kidnap him, Ender!” Tommy corrected. “Shockwave, I get that he’s still under the control of the Egg, but if you just give us time—”

“I’m so fucking stupid,” Shockwave whispered as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Only you two would do something this fucking stupid for him.”

Tommy crossed his arms. “Well, I wouldn’t call it stupid. We had a plan.”

“It could’ve gone better,” Ranboo softly confessed.

“And it could’ve gone worse! But it didn’t!” Tommy argued.

Shockwave ignored them as he kneeled in front of Tubbo until they were face to face. Tubbo’s eyes instantly filled with fear as the criminal placed his hand on Tubbo’s chest. The teenager tried to pull away, but Shockwave calmly said, “Hey, it’s okay. I promise this won’t hurt, Tubbo.”

At first, Tubbo attempted to resist, but it was no use. A soft hum buzzed through the air. It wasn’t before long his eyes fluttered shut and he slumped forward, unconscious.

Tommy, on the other hand, had gone rigid. Any sense of relief he felt had dissipated with a single word.

A single name.

Tommy’s voice was low. “You’re not supposed to know that.”

Thoughts and questions thrashed around his mind as he stared at the criminals in disbelief. This was all wrong. *What else did they know?* Tommy glanced at Ranboo who was also frozen in shock. *Did they know about Ranboo?* Tommy focused on keeping his breathing

level. *Were they working with the heroes?* He didn't have time to freak out right now. *Had they been following him?* He needed a plan. Tommy felt his nails dig into the scars on his palms. They needed to get out of here. *When did they start?* They needed to get Tubbo away from them. *Why would any care about Tubbo's identity though?* They needed to leave. *Why did they care so much? Why did they know they were? Why were they here? Why did Shockwave come? Why did Blade help them? Why did Angel save Ranboo? Why did he trust them? Why did he help them in the first place? Why did Tommy become a vigilante? Why did Dream fire—*

"Tommy," Shockwave's voice cut through his thoughts. There was no power in it, yet the sound of the name settled into a familiar place in Tommy's mind. As if he had heard someone call him like this before.

The ex-vigilante ground his teeth as the feeling of déjà vu made his skin crawl. *No.* He was fucking tired of this. He was tired of the games and the manipulation and the plans and fucking everything else that had gone wrong with his life.

And this was the final fucking straw.

"I don't care that you know my name," he seethed, anger burning behind his chest, "but *why the fuck do you know HIS?* "

Shockwave held his hands up in defense. "If you just let me explain—"

Tommy shot forward and grabbed the front of the villain's jacket. He immediately increased both of their gravities, making the concrete crack under their feet.

"What the hell—" Shockwave grunted under the increasing pressure.

The heat of his anger was raging throughout his body. He didn't care what his powers would do to him. He didn't care about the pressure on his body. ~~***He didn't care about anything. He didn't care about anyone. Everything needed to go.***~~ He didn't care about anyone hearing him as he yelled, "***WHY DO YOU KNOW HIS NAME ?***"

And then,

against the pressure of gravity, Shockwave shakily lifted his arm

and ripped off his red goggles.

Oh no.

Tommy's powers instantly stopped. The two of them fell to the ground, heaving deeply.

No. No. No.

"Are you okay?" Ranboo asked, grabbing Tommy to help him sit up. But Tommy just kept looking forward, he couldn't rip his eyes away from the villain.

There was no fucking way.

“What happened...” Ranboo started to ask, but as he followed his roommate’s gaze, his words went dry.

Sitting in front of them, holding the pair of red goggles, was a man that Tommy used to see every single day.

The same man who would use chalk until it was the tiniest nib as he passionately explained the meaning of a sonnet before playfully throwing it at his students.

The same man who would softly strum simple melodies on his guitar in the last hour before the bookstore closed.

The same man who gave him extra time on his analytical essay about the man who had sex with his mom.

The same man who shut the door in his face.

The same man who hadn’t even noticed he was gone.

The man that sat in front of them was *Mr. Wilbur motherfucking Soot*.

Chapter End Notes

get it,, motherfucking,, like Oedipus,, the guy who had sex with his mom,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,
becuz he is a,, mother,,,
fucker,, i amuse myself

If you enjoyed please leave a comment! I love reading your thoughts about the chapter!
See you in the next one! I hope y'all like the color purple :D

Here are all the links to my various social medias! You can discuss and ask questions in any of these places!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #18: Ignore Rule 17 – You Need a Plan B

Chapter Notes

you know how I said I love dialogue,,,,,, this is 12k words of dialogue,,,, yeah,,,,
#noragerts

tw // fighting, panic attacks, blood, near-death descriptions, stabbing

please stay safe and I hope you enjoy! And if you see any grammar or spelling mistakes
remember to close your eyes!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The air was thick with silence. It was like Tommy was breathing in syrup. His lungs were coated with tension, sticking together as his chest heaved for any bit of relief.

However, reality could not provide any.

Shockwave was Wilbur.

“I just want the best for you. We all do,” Wilbur softly admitted.

Shockwave shrugged with a smile. “Sorry Vigilante, I hate to break it to you, but you’re one of the good ones.”

He couldn’t look away from the brown-haired man, blood pounding in his ears. He dug his nails into his legs, trying to keep his body from shutting down.

“You really want to know why we didn’t contact you, Tommy?” Wilbur’s dark stare made him want to take another step back. “Alright. I’ll tell you. We didn’t even notice you were gone.”

The flood of memories forced his eyes closed. He squeezed them tightly as shock turned into icy realization.

“I am leaving your eardrums intact so you can hear this,” Shockwave’s voice echoed through his head, “you’re out of your league, little vigilante. Go back to fighting car thieves and bank robbers. You are not a hero.”

Wilbur was Shockwave.

And he had known Tommy was a vigilante. The whole fucking time.

Every battle. Every class. Every closing shift. Every lesson. He had known.

And every single fucking time, he lied straight to Tommy’s face.

His tongue was covered with a metallic taste as he accidentally bit the inside of his mouth. If he clenched his jaw any harder he was bound to break a tooth, but that was the last thing he was thinking about.

Who else had Wilbur lied to? What about Phil and Techno? Did this monster really go behind the backs of his family to help literally murderers and criminals to do Prime knows what? This manipulative bastard had really convinced Tommy that he could trust both his civilian personality and his criminal one! And then he acted like Tommy was the one who has done something wrong! He tossed Tommy aside to rot just like Dre—

“Um,” Wilbur’s voice cut through the quiet, “I really wanted to tell—”

Tommy interrupted, his voice dripping with venom, “Do Phil and Techno know? Do they know you are working with a murderer?”

Wilbur stiffened. He slowly turned his head towards his partner behind him, “Well...”

Tommy followed his gaze. The swordsman lifted his hand to his mask and Tommy’s breath stopped in his throat.

He was frozen as he watched Blade pull it down.

The nauseating feeling of déjà vu clawed its way back up Tommy’s spine, sinking its talons into his mind. Once again, there was nothing Tommy could do as he recognized the face of someone who was supposed to be unknown.

And just like before, the swordsman’s unveiled face was no stranger to him.

He slightly turned his head to find Techno clutching the back of his shirt, holding him up. “Wilbur was right. You are clumsy,” his co-worker noted as he pulled Tommy up to his feet.

Just before his face smashed into the concrete, Blade grabbed the back of his hoodie.

Blade lifted Tommy to his feet again before stating, “You and I share very different definitions of ‘fine.’”

The villain’s face belonged to Techno.

“That was the closest you’ve gotten. Nice move with the sword,” Blade noted as he dusted off his pants.

Techno shrugged, “I guess I just admire the fact a lot of effort went into creating these. It’s a bit ironic to let weapons be decorations for a bedroom, but a bladesmith put a lot of work into creating each of these. I feel like it’s a waste to only view them as a way to hurt people. But that’s just my perspective.”

The same Techno that Tommy had handed his resume to. The same Techno that was a giant nerd for mythology. The same Techno that softly smiled at Tommy’s stupid remarks.

He was dragged backward. He felt his hair whip his face as he fell out of the air and crashed into the pavement. His back screamed in pain as Blade stood over him, his sword aiming for his eyes.

Blade was Techno.

He stuck his arms up and caught the sword with his bare hands. The sharp blade dug deep into his palm and he immediately felt wetness run down his arms. It took a second before he registered that his hands were screaming in pain.

Techno was Blade.

~~*Techno was the monster who almost killed him.*~~

No words could even formulate in his head. His mind was spinning at a dizzying speed. He barely was processing the scene in front of him. Techno held Tubbo's unconscious body as Wilbur slowly pushed himself off the ground. Techno and Wilbur were Blade and Shockwave. His co-workers for the past few months were the same criminals that had beaten him black and blue multiple times.

What the fuck was happening? Was this really his fucking life? Why? Why was this happening to him? What did Tommy ever do for this to be his reality?

Techno sighed solemnly, "We know."

Wilbur fiddled with Shockwave's— his goggles as he continued, "And Phil is Angel. We're all a part of the Syndicate. We have been the entire time you've known us."

The pieces clicked together and formed the image of the worst puzzle in existence. The days when the store was randomly closed. Techno's weird obsession with weapons and fear of blood. Their poorly made excuses. Their desire to keep a close eye on Tommy, both as a civilian and a vigilante. Suddenly cutting off Tommy after Bla— Techno almost killed him.

Wilbur hadn't just lied to him.

They all had.

Phil quickly stole a glance at Techno, before laughing in response. "Oh! I also had a fever as well! I tripped because I wasn't feeling very well Saturday night. I was sick and I rolled my ankle. I was both." Tommy looked over at Techno who was nodding in agreement.

Techno. Phil.

Tommy watched as Tubbo and Ranboo shared a glance. A weird feeling washed over him that he hadn't experienced since moving to Visions. Then it clicked. He was being left out of something.

Ranboo. Tubbo.

“Oh my Prime! Tommy look at his face!” Tubbo gestured towards Ranboo who was shamefully looking at the ground. “Of course, he fucking knows! Everyone knows that you’re Vigilante! If random criminals can find out your identity then why the hell wouldn’t your roommates figure it out?!”

Every person he thought he could trust had lied to him.

No. Not just the people he trusted.

Tommy spun around, anger heating up his face. “You know nothing about me!”

“I know you would burn the world down for the ones you cared about,” Shockwave stated.

“Oh yeah? And how the fuck do you know that?” Tommy sneered.

The criminal sighed, “Because I would do the same thing.”

Tommy would never admit it out loud, but the truth was now twisting around his neck, suffocating him. He cared about them. All of them.

He loved reshelving books with Techno. He loved listening to Wilbur’s tangents about his favorite lyrics. He loved learning about the ins and outs of the bookstore from Phil. He loved comparing math homework with Ranboo. He loved stargazing with Tubbo.

He cared so much that he would have brought down the world for them. He would have done it all for them. ~~*Just like Dream.*~~

And they had betrayed him. ~~*Just like Dream.*~~

They had looked at him and lied. *Just like –*

– Dream faced away from Tommy as he spoke, “I don’t need you for this. Just stay in the office and file the reports.”

“B-but, I already did that,” Tommy sputtered out. A frown spread across his face. This was the fifth time this week that Dream had ordered Tommy to file reports instead of allowing him to help. They were supposed to be doing this together. They were supposed to be helping the city together.

Anger boiled behind Tommy’s chest. For the past 6 months, Tommy had done everything right. He had been the perfect assistant. He got every bullshit coffee order, he answered every phone call, he organized countless meaningless meetings and events, and he had done everything else Dream had asked of him. And he had never complained. Not once.

So why had Dream become so cold? Why couldn’t he look at Tommy anymore? Tommy racked his brain, but he couldn’t remember a single thing he had done wrong. He couldn’t remember— why couldn’t he remember—

“Then just sit, Tommy. Stop being a fucking child,” Dream replied without a glance.

Without thinking, Tommy replied, “No.”

The Number One Hero slowly turned. The smile on his white mask immediately made Tommy’s legs begin to quiver, but Tommy forced himself to stand firm.

“What did you say?” The hero’s voice was dark. Every part of Tommy was telling him to apologize, but he couldn’t do it. He needed to know.

“I said, no, Dream. I’m not going to fucking sit around anymore!” Tommy’s voice rose with each word. “Why are you doing this to me? I’ve done everything you wanted me to do! Why won’t you let me help you?!”

The words hung in the air. Dream just simply stood in silence. Tommy gritted his teeth. He couldn’t back down, not now.

Then,

Dream’s emotionless voice sliced through the air, his words plunging into Tommy, “Because you can’t help me.”

The words reverberated through Tommy’s mind, just carving into him like a dull knife, over and over again. Tommy stammered out, “B-but you said that I could help you protect the city.”

“I needed an assistant that was loyal. You seemed like someone who would do anything for me if I said it was for the city. So I lied.”

“What...” Tommy’s body felt numb.

“You are an assistant who barely can organize files alphabetically. Why the fuck would I trust you with protecting the city?”

“I– I just thought–”

Dream’s voice cut him off, “No, Tommy, you’re not supposed to think. Your job is to do what I say. If you can’t do something as simple as that then you can fucking leave.”

“But–”

“You can either stay and file the reports or you can fucking leave. Make your choice.”

Through a clenched jaw, Tommy spat out, “Fuck. You.”

And he forced his spine to be straight as he walked out of the office.

“I’m so fucking stupid,” Tommy cursed under his breath. He dragged his hand down his face to bring himself back to his horrible reality. His eyes stung with wetness.

Whatever anger had been raging within him before seemed like it had completely seeped out. All left was the cold emptiness that echoed through his body. He curled his fingers into fists,

his nails piercing into his palms. Even if he wanted to scream in anger, it would be useless.
~~*All of this was useless.*~~

He knew better than to do this. He wasn't supposed to get attached. He wasn't supposed to care. He wasn't supposed to do any of these things. Yet he did. He had messed up again.

He was supposed to be better. That's why he had done all of this.

But it was clear now. Reality had slapped him in the face with it.

There had never been a right answer to begin with. He thought that he could prove himself to the world that he was good; that he could help people better than the heroes of this city. But there was no good. There was no better. No matter what he did, people got hurt. No matter who he trusted, they would twist the knife into his back.

And it was obvious what was causing his life to go to shit. Tommy had just been too naive to see it.

"Even with superpowers you somehow find a way to fuck up every single part of your life." Tubbo took a step closer. "You're a fucking mistake."

Vigilante or not, it was simple.

It wasn't possible to be better.

If he was the ship of Theseus then all his planks had rotted and he had no one to replace them. No one cared enough to even try. All that was left of him was a useless fucking boat, slowly sinking into the ocean.

And he had no one to blame, except himself.

Suddenly he felt something on his shoulder. Tommy instantly recoiled at the touch with a scowl plastered on his face. Ranboo was beside him, his hand wavering in the air.

Ranboo began to ask, "Tommy—"

"Don't fucking touch me," Tommy cut him off harshly. His whole body was shaking.

Tommy twisted his body back towards the villains. Wilbur was carefully watching him, his eyebrows furrowed in worry. Techno stood behind him silently, still holding an unconscious Tubbo.

He broke eye contact and stared at the ground. Each piece of gravel had its own shadow as the sun rose higher and higher into the sky. Each one was so insignificant to the sun yet its rays still fell upon them. Guess the sun did the same to him.

"Please, Tommy," Wilbur softly begged, "Can you say something?"

Tommy looked back up. Looking at the sun probably would have felt the same.

“What is there to say?” He replied flatly. He had nothing left to give. He was just so fucking tired.

“Do you want to know why? Or what actually happened? Don’t you want us to explain?” Wilbur almost sounded genuine like he was ready to answer anything with his limitless excuses.

“Not really,” Tommy muttered. As fatigue washed over his body, every part of him, down to his bones, ached in pain. He was fighting a losing battle to keep his mind from shattering all over the gravel.

“Don’t do this. Come on. Just listen to me for a minute,” Wilbur was pleading now. Tommy ignored the pain in his voice. Who knew if it was real or not? “You know me, Tommy.”

“No,” Tommy spat out, pushing himself off the ground. “I don’t know you.”

He forced his spine straight as he stepped forward until he just brushed shoulders with the criminal—the villain.

Without a look in Wilbur’s direction, Tommy continued, “and I have *no desire to* .”

He then turned towards Techno, avoiding eye contact and focusing on Tubbo’s rising and falling chest. Tubbo’s chest went *up* as he flatly stated, “Please hand me my friend, Techno. We need to go home now.”

“Oh, okay,” the swordsman quietly replied. *Down*. Techno gently held Tubbo forward. *Up*. And Tommy pulled his friend onto his shoulder. *Down*.

Tommy promised he would save his friend and that’s what he would do. *Up*. His back was screaming with the added weight. *Down*. He would decrease the gravity of Tubbo, but his mind was in no shape to regulate his powers right now. *Up*. His mind wasn’t in much shape to do anything. *Down*. His body was moving on its own at this point. *Up*. He just wanted to go home. *Down*.

He started to walk away from the villains, basically dragging Tubbo along. *Up*. As he passed Ranboo he murmured, “I’m fucking leaving. You can come if you want. I don’t really fucking care.”

“Oh, okay,” Ranboo replied softly and began to follow them. *Down*.

Up. From behind them though Wilbur’s voice began to call out, “Tommy, please—”

“Let him go, Wilbur,” Techno cut him off. *Down*.

“Fuck off!” Wilbur snapped at his partner. *Up*. His voice cracked as he continued, “Ranboo! Please don’t do this! We can help you!”

Tommy kept moving forward slowly, but he heard his roommate stop. *Down*. The gravel crunched under Ranboo’s feet as he spoke, “I’m sorry, Mr. Soot. But I think you’ve helped enough.”

After a few quick footsteps, Ranboo appeared at Tommy's side. *Up*. He grabbed Tubbo's other arm and slung it over his shoulder. *Down*. Neither of them looked back as they left the villains alone in the alleyway.

The déjà vu was permanently stuck to Tommy's skin, making his eyes burn *Up*.

He placed a plank *down* on his rotting ship. He needed to stay afloat a bit longer. He could drown later.

—

Tommy squinted as he looked up at the morning sun. They had moved through a few empty construction lots now, walking by various unfinished buildings, but Tommy wasn't sure how much time had passed. He was only focused on moving his feet up and over the mounds of dirt and rocks. If he stopped moving now, Tommy wasn't sure if he'd be able to get up again.

The skeleton frames of buildings moaned as the wind whistled through them. Tommy was thankful for the ambient noise that filled their journey. The last thing he needed to do was be alone with his thoughts. However, this peace was broken as they turned into a new lot.

"Hey, could we stop for a second?" Ranboo asked, his voice barely louder than the wind.

"We don't have fucking time to stop," Tommy sneered.

"We're barely moving, Tommy. We need to rest," Ranboo stated. Sweat was making his hair and his mask cling to his cheeks. If Tommy was being honest, he probably looked very similar. Plus, even while working together, the two of them were barely holding up Tubbo.

"We don't have—" However, Ranboo didn't let him finish as he slightly tugged on their unconscious roommate, resulting in Tommy stumbling to the ground.

"Fuck you!" Tommy growled as he watched Ranboo gently sit Tubbo down, leaning him against the fence that surrounded the construction site.

"If you just give me a few minutes, I think I'll be able to teleport us back to our dorm," Ranboo replied as he lowered himself to the ground as well.

Tommy attempted to push himself up, but his legs couldn't handle the weight. Fuck. He spun towards his cloaked roommate and spat out, "You can't teleport for shit right now! You barely fucking got us to this random place! You expect me to believe that you can travel across the fucking city?"

Ranboo let out a long sigh. "What other choice do we have Tommy?"

"Maybe if you hadn't fucking stopped us we could have kept moving forward!"

“You call that moving?” Ranboo let out a humorless laugh. “We had barely moved a few feet for the past 5 minutes.”

“What the fuck am I supposed to say, Ranboo?!” Tommy attempted to keep his voice steady, but it was getting harder and harder by the minute. “You can’t teleport, my powers are fucked, we don’t know where the fuck we are, and it seems like every person is out to fucking get us!”

Tommy gripped his pants as he continued, “So yeah! The one thing I know how to do is at least barely shuffle forward, but now I’m stuck on the fucking ground because my legs refuse to fucking move! Fuck!”

A few beats passed as they allowed the wind whistle between them. Now that his body had a taste of rest, the fatigue had tripled in his bones. His joints were beginning to stiffen and the cold sweat crawled down his back like bugs. He was shutting down fast.

“We need help, Tommy,” Ranboo plainly stated.

“Who the fuck could we even ask? Everyone we know is either fucking possessed or a wanted criminal.”

“Tommy. Come on,” Ranboo looked up at him with tired eyes. There was no fucking way Ranboo was actually considering calling that fucking asshole.

“No. *No*. I’d rather fucking get possessed by the dumb fucking egg!” Tommy raged. “Fuck it! I’d rather go back to the *fucking monster that almost killed me* and the lying fucker, *Wilbur*, than go back to that piece of shit!”

“Dream can help us,” Ranboo softly argued. “Maybe he knows what to do to snap Tubbo out of the trance.”

“He doesn’t know shit! The only thing he’s good at is boosting his fucking ego and making sure that we’re all there to praise him for it!”

Ranboo dragged his hand down his face and then sadly exclaimed, “We’ve run out of choices! He’s the only person left we can go to!”

“No, he’s the only person left *you* can go to,” Tommy allowed his voice to be coated with disgust. Ranboo was Dream’s sidekick. He always was and would always be his sidekick. “If you want to crawl back to your favorite hero like a *loyal fucking dog*, then go right ahead.”

“You’re not being fair, Tommy,” Ranboo’s voice was quiet again. “We’re supposed to be doing this together.”

“Ha! *Together?!* ” Tommy gripped his hair as the words just flowed out. “Ranboo, you and I are barely roommates! We can hardly stand each other! The only reason we’re here is because of Tubbo and he’s made it very clear whose side he’s picked!”

“You can’t blame him—”

Tommy's whole body shook as every emotion forced him off the ground. They all bubbled to the top, overflowing into his blood. Tommy's throat was raw as he yelled, "He tried to fucking kill me! For you! He wanted *you instead of me!*"

Suddenly the fire behind his heart went out cold. Tommy softly whispered, "Just like Dream..."

The planks were splintering now. Water was coming onboard. He was sinking and there was nothing he could do as the waves overtook him.

"And they were right," Tommy went on, lowering his eyes to the ground, "Why wouldn't they pick you over me? You're so much better than me."

Ranboo slowly pulled himself up and gently placed a hand on Tommy's shoulders. Even though Tommy had basically spat in his face just seconds ago, there was no bitterness in his voice, "That's not true."

Tommy shook his head. "You've just helped me and I'm yelling at you. Prime, I'm so horrible."

"No," Ranboo countered firmly, "I am not better than you. Please don't say that."

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but a familiar voice rang in the air instead, "Now Ranboo, don't fucking lie to him. Tommy is pretty fucking annoying."

Everything went still.

No.

Tommy was paralyzed as fear enveloped his entire body. Ranboo's eyes mirrored his own as they widened with horrific realization.

No. He couldn't do this right now. Not now. Not now. *Not Now.*

He scrambled for the planks of his mind, trying to keep them from being washed away. He couldn't be drowning right now. But they slipped through his fingers, the shards cutting into his hands. The water continued to rise and he couldn't stop the deck from submerging under the darkness.

His whole body trembled as he slowly turned his head towards the new voice.

Across the empty lot, stood a man in his signature green hero suit with an axe resting on his shoulders.

The man that replaced Tommy with Ranboo.

The hero that always wore a smile.

The Number One Hero of L'Manburg,

Dream.

—

The smiling mask stared at Tommy like an ice pick being hammered between his eyes. He locked his jaw closed to keep his teeth from chattering. His body refused to move as the hero loomed ahead, backlit by the sun. Dream wasn't supposed to be here. He wasn't supposed to know what they were doing. ~~He wouldn't be happy with them. He'd be so disappointed—~~

Ranboo was the first to break out of the shock. He pushed Tommy behind him as he nervously sputtered out, “D-Dream! W-what are you doing here?”

The hero's voice was flat as he replied, “Well, I sent my sidekick for a routine patrol and then he never came back. So I decided to go look for him, but to my surprise, when I finally reached him, I found him with a wanted criminal and an unconscious hostage.”

“I promise it's not what you think!” Ranboo then gestured at Tubbo, “He needed our help! There's this Egg—”

“You two have really fucked this all up,” Dream said as he shook his head. “I'm not surprised about Tommy, but I thought you knew better, Ranboo.”

Wait.

Tommy's brain was finally catching up again.

What the fuck did Dream just say?

Tommy lifted his hand to his face. He was still wearing his mask so how the fuck did Dream—

Not again.

Deja vu was a fucking bitch.

Ranboo took a step forward as he desperately explained, “I had lost my communicator and I didn't know—”

“You fucking told him,” Tommy interrupted.

Ranboo spun around with a confused look. “What?”

Tommy balled his hands into fists and spat out, “You fucking told Dream about who I was! You knew I hated him but you still fucking told him!”

Ranboo's eyes were wide. “I—”

“Are you fucking serious?! You couldn’t keep your damn mouth shut for one thing?! I had one thing, Ranboo!” Tommy couldn’t stop his voice from cracking. His eyes stung as he gripped the red hoodie with his fist. “I had one thing that wasn’t tainted with the legacy of Dream! You took that away from me! And for what? To suck up to your boss?! Really?! *I thought we were friends!*”

“We are—” Ranboo softly began, but a cruel laugh cut him off. The two roommates immediately spun toward the hero.

“How fucking dumb are you?” Dream asked as he tilted his head slightly to one side. Tommy scowled, ready to answer but the hero continued, “You really thought Ranboo was actually your friend?”

“Dream,” Ranboo’s voice was barely a whisper, “please don’t do this.”

The hero ignored his sidekick, keeping his eyes on Tommy as venom slipped into his tone, “You are fucking pathetic. Ranboo didn’t tell me shit! You don’t think I would recognize my old assistant if was he being a fucking dumbass in my city? Do I look like a fucking idiot?!”

Tommy’s heart sunk into his gut. Dream had known. *He had always known.*

“Why the fuck do you think Ranboo became your roommate? Why do you think he continued to be nice to you even though you’re the fucking worst? Why do you think he tolerated you for this long? It’s because I fucking told him to!”

Ranboo was simply doing what he had been told.

Tommy glanced around waiting for someone to help him out, but all his peers kept their heads forward. Not a single person even looked in his direction. Not even Tubbo moved. Tommy felt his face heat up. “Here, you can use mine,” a voice said a few seats away from him. He turned to see Ranboo holding out a piece of paper.

It had all been an act.

“You know that doesn’t stop me from still considering you as my friend, right?” Ranboo smiled.

It had never been real.

Ranboo turned to him with serious eyes. “But you matter. You deserve respect.”

Ranboo was never his friend.

“W-why?” Tommy whispered. He kept his eyes on the mask of the hero. He couldn’t even look at his roommate. He was barely standing right now. His ship was just sinking deeper and deeper.

Dream let out a sigh. Instantly, Tommy felt his heart speed up. It was like he was back at the Headquarters after filling out the wrong form, his shoulders rapidly filling with anxiety. The hero’s voice was filled with pity as he replied, “Because all you ever do is mess things up.”

“What?” Tommy could barely process what Dream was saying. His head was spinning.

“I have to keep watch of you because someone needs to be there to clean up your messes. The only reason I let you roam around freely this whole time as Vigilante is that it would have been a bigger mess to clean if I kept you bottled up in a cell.”

Tommy gripped his hair. He was barely hearing the words anymore, the pounding in his head was drowning out his thoughts. However, the hero continued, “I didn’t fucking care that you caught a few car thieves or stopped a mugging! I let you use your powers to hop around the city and be an annoying prick as much as you wanted! I even let you get away with saving the Syndicate! I could care less about those shitty thieves! As long as you stayed in your fucking place, I didn’t care what you did, Tommy. But *now*, you really have fucked things up.”

“I– I don’t understand what I did wrong,” Tommy whispered. “I just wanted to help my friends.”

“That’s the fucking problem! You want to do things, yet you don’t fucking think things through!” Dream walked forward as Tommy shrunk in shame. “So you got your friend away from the Egg cult, but now what?! What was the next step of your plan?”

“I– I wasn’t–”

“Exactly! It’s things like this that make you a liability. You have to be constantly monitored or you fuck things up for everyone. It definitely didn’t help that you somehow roped Ranboo into this fucking mess.”

“You know about the Egg cult?” Ranboo quietly interjected.

Dream snapped his head towards his sidekick, making Ranboo flinch. “Of course, I fucking know about the Egg cult. I am the Number One Hero of L’Manburg. I know every single thing that goes on in this city. Why the fuck wouldn’t I notice a plant that fucking brainwashes people?”

Ranboo dropped his head, shifting uncomfortably. “You had never mentioned it before so I didn’t–”

“What the fuck did you want me to do, Ranboo? Broadcast to the people of the city that there’s a plant that fucking mind controls people? Did you want me to start a widespread panic?”

“No, I didn’t think–”

“Fuck! When I said to keep watch of Tommy I didn’t expect him to rub off on you like this,” Dream remarked disappointedly. “I had the situation under control until two dumbass teenagers decided to fuck it all up! Now Shadow’s all over the fucking news calling for the arrest of the Red Hoodie Vigilante!”

Tommy gripped the sleeves of his hoodie. The breeze was cutting straight through it, making his whole body shiver. It had all been pointless. All his attempts to get away from his past had been useless. He thought he was free of Dream, but in reality, Dream was still pulling his strings. Right from the fucking start. This was useless. ~~**He was useless. This world was worthless. He needed to start it over.**~~

After a few beats, the hero stepped over and gently placed his hand on Ranboo's shoulder. The sidekick looked at his mentor with wide eyes as the hero continued in a much more calm tone, "Lucky for you two, I can clean this up. Just apologize for your mistakes and we can put this behind us."

Ranboo immediately spoke up, "I'm really sorry, Dream. I didn't mean to get in the way of your plan."

The hero simply nodded in response before directing his focus on the ex-vigilante. "Tommy?"

Tommy kept his head down as he tried to move his fingertips to keep them from going numb. He was tired of this. He was tired of the mistakes. He was tired of the pain. And he was now fucking cold. He hated the cold.

He had no friends. He had no backup. He had no plan B. He had nothing. There was no use fighting anymore. He couldn't anymore. He just wanted to go home. Tommy ignored the twist in his stomach as he quietly began, "I'm sor—"

"Don't apologize to this fucking asswipe," a new voice entered the conversation. "He's full of shit."

Tommy's breath stopped in his throat as he noticed a red flash in the corner of his eye.

Suddenly, Tommy was shoved backward as someone stepped in between him and the hero. His eyes went wide as he recognized the dark coat fluttering in the breeze and the red goggles that reflected the sun.

Shockwave was here.

Wilbur was here.

"And if someone needs to apologize, it's us," a deep voice said from beside Tommy, making him jump. He turned to find Blade— *Techno* —with a hand gripping his sword handle, "but not to this green Teletubby."

Wilbur craned his head and asked, "You good?"

Tommy silently nodded his head. He couldn't decide whether to feel relieved or stressed. It seemed like his body couldn't either as he stood frozen in place.

Dream, on the other hand, was not thrilled by the new guests. The hero spat out, "What the hell do you two want?"

“Can’t I just say hello to L’Manburg’s Number One Hero?” Wilbur smirked.

“This doesn’t concern you,” Dream snapped. “Not to mention you and your partner are currently wanted for murder. Get out of here before I arrest you.”

Wilbur laughed. “You wish you could catch us. Which one of us lost every single match-up at the Academy?”

“At least I wasn’t a fucking coward .”

The Academy? Tommy thought. *Wasn’t that the hero school that Dream had gone to? But why was Wilbur bringing it up?*

“But you are a fucking psycho. The Academy brought out the best in us, didn’t it?” Wilbur’s voice dripped with sarcasm.

“Go home, *Wilbur*. Deal with the monster you already have before adopting another one.”

Tommy frowned at the insult before furrowing his eyebrows in confusion. *How the fuck did Dream know- oh fuck no.*

However, Wilbur didn’t even flinch at his name as he hissed, “ *Fuck. You.* ”

The hero let out a chilling laugh in response. “I can’t believe it, Tommy! Out of all the criminals you could have joined, you found the two that are almost as big of fuck ups as you are!”

“What the hell is he talking about?” Tommy asked hoarsely. However, looking at Techno and Wilbur’s faces, Tommy had a sinking feeling that his guess wasn’t too far off.

The criminals exchanged a look, but the hero was the one to speak first, “Oh, they didn’t tell you?”

“Don’t you fucking—” Wilbur attempted, but Dream had no intention of stopping.

“They were going to be *heroes*. Do you really think some random criminals can just go toe to toe with the top heroes of the city? Fuck no! They had the fucking suits and everything! But then out of the fucking blue, they both quit,” Dream titled his head as Tommy noticed Wilbur and Techno shift uncomfortably. “And you want to know why? *Hm?* It’s because they were *too fucking selfish* to think of anyone but themselves. They thought they knew better than everyone else so they fucking left. Well, I guess the three of you have that in common.”

Heroes. Wilbur and Techno—Shockwave and Blade—were supposed to be heroes. Like ‘names on the fucking billboards and sidewalk benches’ heroes. Tommy clenched his jaw together. He hadn’t even fucking wondered why Shockwave and Blade were so good at fighting. He had just let them beat the shit out of him over and over again.

The cycle was never-ending. With every answer, just more and more questions appeared. All he ever had was questions. His head was screaming at this point. *Why wouldn’t someone just be fucking clear with him? Why couldn’t someone just tell him the truth? Why did everything*

have to be so fucking difficult? How did Dream know he had powers? When did Ranboo start lying to him? Did Tubbo lie to him too? Why were Techno and Wilbur in the hero program? How did any of this have to do with the Egg? How did Tommy bring it here? Did Dream know? What else did Dream know? What was Dream hiding from him? Why couldn't he remember? He just wanted to go home. He just wanted to go back to simple. ~~He wanted to go back to nothing. There should be nothing. Everything was useless to him. He needed to start again Everything needed to go.~~

Suddenly a soft hum broke him away from his thoughts. The calm drone washed over his whole body. Tommy opened his eyes to see Wilbur gripping his shoulder. He had resisted the urge to lean into the vibration that came from the criminal.

Then from beside him, Techno stated flatly, "You're really bad at telling stories, Dream."

"Not to mention, you're just fucking wrong," Wilbur added, annoyed. "The reason we didn't become heroes is that you guys have the worst fucking clothes in the entire world."

Then without a glance, Wilbur whispered, "I'm sorry for touching you, but your heartbeat was going way too fast. You were about to pass out."

He dropped his hand from Tommy's shoulder before raising his voice and asking, "Like who the hell wants to wear bright fucking green?"

Tommy ignored the way his body missed the soothing pulse as he tried to keep up with reality again. He forced his head up and focused on what was happening in front of him. The last thing he needed to do was pass out.

"I'm not fucking arguing with a couple of murderers!" Dream fumed. "This is your final warning! Leave or I'm arresting all three of you!"

"Wait! Dream!" Ranboo jumped between the hero and the villains with his hands up in defense. "Maybe they can help us! They hate the Egg cult as much as we do! We're all on the same side!"

The sidekick's words hung in the silence for a few seconds. The tension made the air so dense Tommy had to remind himself to breathe.

Then,

Dream firmly gripped Ranboo's shoulder. The sidekick immediately went stiff as the hero called loudly, "TOMMY!"

Tommy almost jumped out of his skin at the sudden announcement of his name, but the hero continued with a horrifically calm tone, "What are the rules when making deals with criminals?"

"I—" Tommy stuttered, his mouth moving before his mind could compose an answer. Every cell in his body was screaming at him to reply to ~~his boss~~ Dream as fast as possible.

“You don’t have to answer him,” Wilbur cut in before directing his attention at the hero, “Let him go, Dream.”

“ *Tommy!* ” Dream repeated, his voice echoed into Tommy’s head. All the relief Wilbur’s touch had provided was gone as he shook in fear. “ *What are the rules when making deals with criminals?* ”

“Let him go!”

“ *TOMMY!* ”

“There are none!” The words tumbled out of his mouth. He was set into autopilot as the rules that he had memorized so long ago came flooding back, “According to the bylaws created by the Justice Council, heroes are not permitted to conspire or make deals with criminals of any nature.”

“Tommy...” Wilbur whispered under his breath.

“Finish the rule,” Dream ordered.

Tommy weakly continued, “Doing so may result in the termination of hero status and/or a prison sentence of up to 10 years.”

“Thank you, Tommy,” the hero replied and Tommy hated the way his heart hung on to the praise. He was supposed to be better than this. He was supposed to hate Dream. The hero, on the other hand, didn’t even spare Tommy a glance as he continued, “Now, Ranboo, are you implying that you want me to get my hero status revoked?”

“No, s-sir,” Ranboo trembled.

“I didn’t fucking think so,” Dream’s voice was like venom, stinging with each word.

“However, based on your previous statement, it seems like I may have to revisit your position as my apprentice.”

Ranboo turned with wide eyes. “But I—”

The hero clutched the sidekick’s shoulder, making Ranboo groan in pain. Then he replied coldly, “Now get out of my fucking way.”

Suddenly, Ranboo was thrown to the side, slamming into the fence, and crumpled to the ground.

Tommy started to shout, “Ran—”

“***Move!*** ” Wilbur cut him off and an invisible force pushed Tommy backward, sending him tumbling to the ground.

Tommy snapped his head up to find a flurry of purple particles where he was once standing. That piece of shit had copied Ranboo.

Wilbur and Dream immediately started to engage in a dizzying battle. Tommy's eyes could barely keep up with Dream's sporadic axe strikes amidst purple particles as Wilbur scrambled to dodge the blows. Dream recoiled slightly from vibration blasts, but then he would simply just appear in a new place and attack again. Wilbur spun and barely missed the axe from slicing off his arm. He glanced over at Tommy and for a brief moment the two of them locked eyes.

All Tommy could do was watch with horror on his face as the criminal then pushed off the ground and slammed his body into the hero. The two of them flew through the entrance of the nearest unfinished building and out of Tommy's sight.

"Wil-" Tommy was cut off by someone placing their hand on his shoulder.

He jumped and twisted to find Techno standing next to him. The swordsman's eyes were filled with concern as he asked, "Are you okay?"

"I- I'm not sure," Tommy spluttered. He then shook his head. His heart pounded against his chest as he went on, "But it doesn't matter. We need to go help-"

"You need to grab your friends and leave," Techno interrupted sternly.

"I can't just leave you guys!" Tommy argued.

"We'll be fine. We can handle Dream," Techno looked over his shoulder at Tubbo. He was peacefully resting on the fence. "But you need to finish your job. Get your friend to safety."

Tommy felt his nails dig into his palms as a knot formed in his gut. Techno was right. Tubbo couldn't stay here. At least Ranboo had some sort of power to help him escape, but Tubbo was helpless. If he got caught in the fight then- Tommy squeezed his eyes shut. He didn't even want to imagine it.

Techno then grabbed Tommy's arm and helped him to his feet. His legs shook as Tommy reoriented himself. He caught a glimpse of Ranboo slowly stirring on the other side of the fence. A brief moment of relief passed through him as he realized his roommate was still alive. Tommy attempted to let go of the criminal but abruptly felt his knees go weak. He gripped Techno again to regain balance. Fuck. That wasn't good.

And then a wave of realization washed over him as his vision switched between his two roommates.

"Techno..." Tommy softly voiced. "I can't finish this."

"What?" Techno replied, confusion flashing on his face.

"I can barely stand on my own. Ranboo and I were hardly carrying Tubbo earlier. I can't carry him on my own in this state. Not to mention, I don't even know where I could take him that would be safe. I have nowhere to go," Tommy looked up at his old co-worker, his voice shaking, "but *you* do."

"Wait-"

Tommy squeezed Techno's arm. "You promised you would keep my friend safe. You need to take him somewhere safe."

"What about the sidekick?" Techno countered. "I can't just leave—"

A loud bang cut him off followed by the building behind them shaking. They didn't have time for this.

"You just need to get Tubbo to a safe place and then you can come back! Ranboo and I can help Wilbur until you get back, okay?"

"But—"

"*You promised*," The desperation in Tommy's voice was clear. He didn't even attempt to keep his voice from cracking, "I-I need you to do this for me. *Please*."

Techno furrowed his eyebrows in thought. After an excruciating second, the swordsman let out a sigh. "Okay. I'll take him back to the headquarters. I'll grab Phil too. But if you guys see an opportunity to escape, take it."

Tommy nodded in understanding as he replied, "Thank you, Techno."

"Just don't stop moving until I come back," the swordsman ordered as he softly squeezed Tommy's arm. He then turned away and carefully picked up Tubbo into his arms before running out of sight.

Another loud clang interrupted Tommy's moment of relief. Another wave of vibrations shook the ground and Tommy instinctually increased his gravity to keep his balance. *Thank Prime*. He had gotten back some energy to use his powers, even if it was in the most minimal way. Tommy gave his body a quick shake and focused on his new job: to keep moving.

His deck may have overturned but he wasn't planning on letting his ship reach the ocean floor just yet.

"Ranboo!" Tommy yelled, approaching his roommate, but he didn't react. As Tommy came closer he saw that Ranboo was staring at his hands with a look of disbelief. Tommy worriedly asked, "Are you hurt?"

Ranboo looked up with a look of surprise like he didn't notice Tommy kneeling next to him. He quietly answered, "No, I'm not hurt."

"So what the fuck are you doing? We need to go help Wilbur!"

Ranboo broke eye contact and looked back down at his hands. He slowly opened and closed them in and out of fists. It was clear Ranboo was barely listening.

Tommy grabbed his roommate's shoulder and urgently continued, "Hey! We don't have time for you to be in shock! Wilbur needs our help. So you need to get up—"

"I can't help you," Ranboo interrupted.

Tommy frowned. “What the fuck?! Are you really being a fucking coward right—”

Ranboo snapped his head up with fearful eyes, making Tommy stop. The sidekick shakily continued, “Tommy, I can’t teleport.”

“What?” Tommy breathed. The headache hammering his skull had returned. “What the hell do you mean you can’t teleport?”

“I’ve been trying this whole time, but I just can’t. Even when I’m super tired I can teleport small distances, but right now... it’s like I can’t even feel them. It’s like they’ve disappeared or like—”

“Like someone *stole* them,” Tommy finished.

The ground shook once again as a loud bang sounded through the air. The two roommates looked at each other with wide eyes. Tommy ran his hand through his hair. There was no fucking way. Most people didn’t even have superpowers. If someone had even one, they were seen as incredibly rare. But having two powers? That was unheard of.

Confusion filled Ranboo’s face as he thought aloud, “You don’t think Dream is able to do that though... right?”

“How the fuck would I know?! But the person who currently has teleportation powers is Dream and not you!”

“But Dream copies powers! He’s never mentioned being able to take them away!”

“When the fuck had Dream told us anything?!” Tommy retorted. “Let’s just pray this is temporary like his copying ability, okay?”

Another boom filled the air and significant scaffolding fell off the side of the building. Tommy clenched his jaw. He had no desire to find out if Dream could steal powers permanently. They needed to escape as soon as possible.

Tommy started to push himself off the ground, but Ranboo grabbed his arm. His roommate’s voice was timid. “Are you really going to fight him?”

The anxiety straining Tommy’s shoulders was asking the same question. All the other times Dream had been toying with him, letting Tommy think he had the upper hand. However, this time was different. Dream was no longer playing.

Tommy gave a weak smile. “The little bitch just fired the best sidekick he could ever have. I’m just going to go let him know what I think about that.”

Ranboo also suppressed a smile and let go of his arm. “Just please don’t get caught.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not going to.”

“Seriously, if you do, Tubbo will probably kill both of us when he wakes up,” Ranboo noted.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Tommy replied with one last nod before sprinting into the unfinished building.

—

As soon as he entered, the whole building shook again. He twisted around trying to find the fight, but he didn’t have to look for long. The wall next to him burst open and a person flew past him with a flurry of purple particles.

“Tommy!” Wilbur yelled from behind him. Tommy spun around to find the criminal pretty beaten up. His clothes were ripped in multiple places and his goggles had lost a lens. “Get out of here! It’s not saf—”

However, Tommy didn’t hear the rest of his sentence as suddenly someone grabbed him from behind and forced him into a chokehold.

“This would have been so simple if you just fucking surrendered,” Dream hissed into his ear as his grip tightened.

“Fuck. Off,” Tommy grunted as he grasped the hero’s arm and immediately decreased his gravity.

The two of them flung into the air and hit the ceiling with a *crack*. Dream let Tommy go and Tommy slammed to the ground. Dream teleported around the air for a few seconds before Tommy released the hero of his control. He could already feel the exhaustion coming back into his muscles. So his powers were still weren’t the most reliable.

Great news for a fight, Tommy thought. Then before he could get a good look at the hero, he was pulled back into one of the hallways.

“What the hell are you doing?” Wilbur whispered harshly as he pushed the two of them into a corner.

“I came to help you!” Tommy replied, echoing his voice. “Obviously!”

“Where is Techno? You’re in no shape to be fighting right now!”

“He’s getting Tubbo to safety! We need to grab Ranboo and get out of here!”

“Why didn’t you just fucking leave with Ranboo?”

Tommy scoffed, “Come on I know you have a cool power but don’t act like you weren’t just getting your ass handed to you. Plus Ranboo got his power stolen so—”

Wilbur stuck his hands out. “Wait. Wait. Wait. What happened to Ran—”

However, he didn't get to finish as a loud smash came from above them. Then Dream's voice echoed throughout the building, "Come out of your little hiding hole, cowards! Fight me or just surrender! I won't hesitate to bring this fucking building down with you in it!"

Another loud smash followed the announcement, resulting in the whole building shaking again. Dust from the cracking stone sprinkled their hair like it had started snowing. Tommy pushed down the feeling of nausea as he said, "Let's just leave, Wilbur! We can't stop him!"

"Does it look like I'm trying to stop him?" Wilbur argued. "I was trying to distract him long enough for you to escape!"

"I wasn't going to leave you!" Tommy snapped back.

"Tom—"

Wilbur was cut off by the wall across from them being smashed to pieces. As the dust settled, the hero stood in the hole. He looked remarkably unscathed compared to Wilbur, besides a crack that had formed on his mask. Dream held his axe up with two hands as he calmly remarked, "There you two are."

Tommy was immediately pushed back as Wilbur placed himself between the ex-vigilante and the hero. In a low voice, Wilbur stated, "You proved your point. Your fighting is as bad as your fashion sense. We get it. Please spare us from looking at your awful clothes anymore."

Tommy stifled a laugh as Dream spat back, "Your shitty jokes mean nothing to me. I'll do anything to protect this city and right now, you are the biggest threat to it."

"Are you joking? What about the fucking mind-controlling Egg?!" Tommy cut in.

"I had it under control!" Dream seethed and Tommy's body instinctively tried to recoil. He hated the way his body would react to Dream's voice. The hero continued, pissed off, "Nothing happens in this city without my knowledge! Do you want to know why? It's because this is *my city*. *I own it*. The Egg wasn't a problem until *someone* started to fucking act on their own accord! The biggest fucking threats to anyone in this city are the ones who don't fucking understand their place in it. If someone can't follow the rules of *my city*, then *they must be removed from it*."

Tommy grimaced. He knew Dream was a narcissistic bastard, but this was fucking insane.

"You don't sound very heroic saying shit like that," Wilbur replied. His voice was strong, but Tommy could see how his hands shaking.

Dream slightly tilted his head as he flatly concluded, "I don't care."

The hero then leaped forward and disappeared into the veil of purple particles. Wilbur cursed loudly as he grabbed Tommy and pulled the two of them away from the corner. Tommy felt fingertips barely brush his hood as he was launched across the room and saw Dream standing where he used to be.

Wilbur put his fingers together to snap, but it was clear that he had already tried this trick. Dream jumped forward and tackled the man, slamming him into a pillar. The wood splintered from the impact and the hero pushed his elbow into the criminal's neck. Wilbur clawed at the arm as he started to turn blue.

Dream scoffed, "It's hard to use those little sound attacks without a voice, huh?"

Tommy felt a burning rage behind his chest. Stupid Green Teletubby. What the fuck had Tommy even seen in him?

His body was moving on pure adrenaline as he sprinted directly at the hero. However, Dream expected this. He let his elbow fall from Wilbur's neck and gripped the criminal by the jacket and threw him directly into the charging ex-vigilante. The two of them collided with a *slam* and skidded across the concrete, gravel scrapping at Tommy's hands and face.

Tommy didn't have time to lie on the ground. He barely rolled out of the way as an axe almost cut off a limb. He scrambled to his feet, aiming to get away from Dream as fast as possible. He attempted to anchor his gravity to the opposite wall, but as Tommy twisted around he found that the building had lost a majority of its walls and pillars in the fight between Wilbur and Dream. All that was left was piles of rocks and rebar sticking out of the pillars in various directions. A loud groan echoed throughout the building. Fuck. That didn't sound good.

SMASH!

Tommy turned to find Wilbur barely ducking out of the way as Dream wrenched his axe out of another support beam. Beside him, a pillar snapped in half and a louder groan followed after. A giant slab of concrete fell from the ceiling across the room. *Double Fuck.*

Tommy called out, "Wilbur! The building is going to—"

Suddenly, he was enveloped in a flurry of purple particles. The next moment he slammed face-first into a mound of dirt. He shot up, spitting mud out of his mouth. Tommy spun around to see that he had somehow made it outside of the building.

"What the fuck?" he wondered out loud.

"Why won't you just give up?" Dream's voice said from behind him, making Tommy jump.

Tommy frowned as he faced the masked man. "I don't have to answer you."

Dream crossed his arms and let out a sigh. "I know you won't believe me, but this is for your own good."

"I don't believe a single fucking word that comes out of your mouth."

"Believe whatever you want, Tommy. I don't give a shit anymore as long as you stay out of my way," Dream turned and began to walk away. "I'll be here if you decide to actually make the right choice once in your life."

Tommy huffed as he turned his back on the hero. Guess Dream had lost interest in beating up his old assistant. Typical. He had no desire to ever see that man again. Another loud clang rang through the air. Shit. The building.

He glanced around and saw Ranboo running up to him with a frantic look. His roommate panted, “W-what’s happening? Where’s Mr. Soot?”

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. “What the hell do you mean? Didn’t he make it out of the building?”

“I thought he was with you!”

“No, I—” He had been teleported out by Dream, meaning that Wilbur was...

shitshitshitshit

Without a thought, Tommy sprang up and ran towards the crumbling building, ignoring Ranboo’s shouts. Wilbur was about to be flattened. There was no time for a plan. There was only time to move.

He scrambled up to the entrance, looking for a semblance of a person between the falling bricks and concrete. The groaning of the disintegrating building was just getting louder and louder. Then in the corner of his eye, he saw Wilbur slowly pushing himself off the ground.

Tommy dodged falling debris as he sprinted toward Wilbur. He dropped to his knees and found Wilbur clutching his head, blood running down his face.

“You shouldn’t be here,” Wilbur softly scolded, squinting at Tommy.

“Suck it up, I’m here. Let’s go,” Tommy replied as he swung one of Wilbur’s arms over his shoulder and began to lift him up. Tommy slightly decreased Wilbur’s gravity to help carry him.

However, reality truly enjoyed breaking apart Tommy’s life right in front of him.

A significant part of the ceiling smashed to the ground behind them. Tommy scrambled back as more and more of the ceiling came tumbling down. Tommy twisted around, frantically looking for a way out. Then he saw it: one last exit that wasn’t blocked by rubble.

However, there was no way both of them were making it over there before the ceiling collapsed on them.

“Shit, we gotta move,” Wilbur groaned. But Tommy gripped the back of Wilbur's jacket as he focused on the fence right outside of the entrance.

But one of them could.

Concrete slammed into the ground next to them, making the ground shake. They had run out of time. There was only one thing Tommy could do.

“Hey, Wilbur,” Tommy whispered, “please don’t fail me for this.”

Wilbur raised his eyebrows and began, “What—”

But Tommy didn’t let him continue. He was too busy doing what he did best: acting without thinking.

And without thinking, Tommy anchored Wilbur’s gravity to the fence outside of the exit. The criminal flew out of Tommy’s arms and crashed into the fence.

All Wilbur could do was watch as two tons of concrete collapsed onto Tommy.

—

Pressure.

There was so much pressure.

On his hands. On his back. On his legs. On his head.

Everywhere. Every single cell in his body was being pressed down in excruciating pain.

Static buzzed in his ears as he pushed against the pressure with every ounce of energy in his body. Small croaks escaped his throat as he reminded himself to let air into his flattening lungs. Numbness had already begun to crawl up his arms and down his legs.

For the longest time, weight had meant nothing to Tommy. That was his power. It was his to control. Making pens stuck to the ground had been a breeze. Making a shipping container float was like getting a good stretch. With just a thought he could be as light as a feather one second and the next he was immovable.

But the bone-crushing pressure of a building resting on his back was unlike anything he had ever experienced. He dug his fingers into the ground trying to keep the building from shifting above him. Gravity pulled down on everything around him and Tommy could barely put up a fight.

A corner of the ceiling broke off and smacked him on the side of his forehead. Something wet dripped down his face and splattered to the ground beneath him. He couldn’t tell if it was tears or sweat or blood. All he could do was squeeze his eyes shut and focus on resisting the pressure. He couldn’t die. He couldn’t die. He needed to finish his job.

His limbs were starting to spasm under the force. It was like he could feel each fiber in his muscles screaming as they ripped apart.

He knew he needed to keep pushing back. He needed to withstand the pressure. He needed to be strong.

But he was just in so much *pain*.

He let out a shivering breath. No. He couldn't think about how his body was crying for relief. There was no way his bones would last much longer. But he had no choice. He couldn't die. If he died that meant he would have failed. He would have failed everyone.

“– boo! I hear something here!” A distant voice called from above. Tommy recognized the voice. It was someone close to him. His arms were shaking so badly now that Tommy was barely keeping balance. The voice– Wilbur, it was Wilbur– continued to get louder, “Tommy! Can you hear me? Please say something!”

Tommy wasn't sure if his brain was playing tricks on him or if Wilbur had actually found him. With a speck of hope, Tommy hoarsely answered, “I'm here. P–please h-help.”

Each beat of silence passed with the feeling of burning heat weaving into his tendons. Wilbur was here, Tommy just needed to wait for one more second. Just one more. Just one more. Just one more. Just one more. Just one–

“He's here! He's alive!” Rapid panic soaked into Wilbur's voice. “Tommy! We can't see you yet, but we're going to get you out! Okay?!”

“Okay,” Tommy mumbled. He believed Wilbur. His thoughts felt like jello, melting in his skull. Wilbur liked thinking though. Maybe he could think for both of them.

“Fuck!” Wilbur cursed loudly. Tommy gritted his teeth as his heart clenched onto hope. Maybe Wilbur had thought of a good plan. Wilbur seemed like he liked plans.

Tommy wanted to reply, but it was taking every ounce of energy in him to keep the rubble above him from smashing down. Luckily, Wilbur's voice came through again, much calmer, “Hey Tommy, Ranboo and I are working super hard to get you out. Please just hold on a little longer.”

But that was just the thing, wasn't it?

Tommy attempted to hold back a sob. He could feel his tears creep along his jawline. His joints were mere seconds away from buckling under the strain.

He couldn't hold on any longer.

He couldn't do it anymore.

He had to give in.

He had to give up.

The pain was too much.

He was tired.

He was so fucking tired.

He thought he could be strong.

He just wanted to be strong.

He didn't want to do it one more time.

He couldn't even do it one more time.

There was no way that he could do it —

– *“One more time. Okay?” Dream’s voice was soft as if he actually cared. It was the same voice he used the last four times he had said this sentence.*

Tommy didn’t mind. Dream was just pushing him to be stronger. Tommy needed to be strong.

“One more time,” Tommy echoed.

Dream stepped multiple steps back and said—

– “Remember to ground yourself,” Tommy whispered. He clenched his hands into fists.

He just needed to do it one more time. He allowed his warmth to abandon his limbs and seep into the dirt. The cold made a shiver run down his spine. Tommy resisted the urge to shake. He needed to be still. The icy numbness inched up his arms. He gripped the dirt in one hand as he rapidly shifted his weight. He snapped his arm up and caught the debris with the other. He swallowed the bile that rose up his throat. Then he twisted his body and dug his soles into the ground as he released his other arm and planted it on the falling concrete.

He clawed into the rock with everything he had. His body was burning in agony as Tommy pushed against the force of two tons of stone and metal. He pulled against every crack, every space, every attraction between particles. He could do this. He needed to do this. ~~**He had to fix his mess. This way he could start all over again. He wanted to start over.**~~

And then,

a scream ripped out of his throat just as the rubble exploded above him.

Tommy was thrown backward by the burst of energy. He slammed into a pile of rubble and a sharp pain stabbed his abdomen.

Black spots filled his vision as he blinked away the dust from his watering eyes. His ears were ringing as Tommy tried to lift himself up, but a piercing stab stopped him. Before he could figure out what was still holding him down, a cry came from behind the dust cloud.

“Tommy! Tommy!” Wilbur and Ranboo’s voices mixed together. Relief washed through his body as the two of them cut through the veil. Both were covered in a thin layer of grime from the explosion and other than Wilbur’s previous injuries, neither of them looked hurt.

Wilbur’s face was clear of his goggles and Ranboo’s hood and mask were gone too. Their eyes lit up as they made eye contact with Tommy. They were okay. His friends were actually

okay. Tommy replied with a soft smile.

But then,

Horror replaced the light.

Ranboo clasped a hand over his mouth. Wilbur quietly gasped, “Tommy...”

The ex-vigilante furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. But then he realized that they were no longer making eye contact with him. Tommy lowered his eyes, following their gaze.

His breath caught in his throat. *Oh.*

A steel rod was sticking out of his stomach.

The steel rod had gone straight through him.

Tommy stood frozen as he stared at the metal rebar, wet with blood. *His blood. The blood that used to be inside of him.* He could feel his clothes slowly becoming damp as well. *This was not good. This was not good at all.*

He slowly looked back up at Ranboo and Wilbur, their eyes filled with fear. Tommy softly chuckled, “Well, that’s not supposed to be there.”

The rod scraped the dirt as Tommy stumbled a few steps forward before collapsing to the ground. His throat burned as the taste of metal filled his mouth. Wilbur and Ranboo appeared on either side of him. Tommy tried to smile at them. He knew that they liked it when Tommy was happy. Tommy wanted to be happy for them. Fuzziness filled his vision while he watched globs of red dripping to the ground beneath. The tiny amount of warmth left in his body quickly evaporated with each drip. He shuddered. He hated the cold.

Suddenly, a small amount of pressure pressed down on his stomach near the pole. Anxiety bloomed against his ribcage for a moment, before he turned his head to see Ranboo clenching the area near the rod.

Tommy then felt a hand on the back of his neck. A gentle buzz hummed in his ears. Tommy strained his eyes to see Wilbur above him, his mouth moving fast, but Tommy could barely catch any of the words. All he wanted to do was listen to the calm murmur.

However, Tommy knew that Wilbur was probably saying something important. Wilbur always said important stuff. Like when they had exams or where to put the cash box or how to dodge an attack. So Tommy focused on listening to his teacher. He was a great listener.

“—have you tried recently?!” Wilbur stressed.

“They still won’t work,” Ranboo answered timidly. Oh yeah, Ranboo was sad about his powers. Tommy didn’t like that Ranboo was sad. Ranboo was his friend. “I— I can’t do anything right now.”

“Fuck,” Wilbur said under his breath. He then took a deep breath in before continuing, “It’s okay. I know it’s not your fault. Phil and Techno are on their way, I’ll just call them to hurry. It’s fine. We’ll be fine. He’ll be fine.”

“But Techno doesn’t like blood,” Tommy weakly interjected. Ranboo and Wilbur looked at him with surprise. Or what Tommy thought was surprise. Tommy couldn’t really see much anymore. All he could do was feel. And all he was feeling was his body throbbing in pain.

“Oh hey Tommy,” Wilbur replied warmly, “don’t worry about Techno. He’ll be fine when he comes to help you.”

“Oh, good...” Tommy slurred. He lifted his hand over the rod and continued, “But we should probably take this thing out before he gets here. He wouldn’t like to see all this blood.”

Ranboo grabbed his hand and quickly protested, “No! No, we don’t want to pull that out! Techno would hate it if we pulled it out!”

“Oh,” Tommy frowned. “I don’t want Techno to hate me. He already tried to kill me once. That was not fun.”

Wilbur and Ranboo exchanged a glance, but Tommy ignored them. Instead, focused on trying to keep his eyes from drooping. However, fatigue had begun to seep into his veins. It was slowly spreading throughout his body, his limbs already numb.

“Come on. Come on. Pick up, for fucks sake!” Wilbur voiced into a small communicator on his wrist. A little beep ran out as a new voice came through.

“Wilbur? How are you holding up? Techno came back and I—” But the voice was interrupted by Wilbur’s rapid tongue.

“Phil! We have an emergency! You need to come as fast as possible! It doesn’t matter if anyone sees you!”

“Are you okay? What happened?” Phil’s voice was filled with confusion. Phil usually was happy. Tommy liked Phil.

“Tommy— he— um—” Wilbur stuttered. He could barely keep his hands steady as he spoke. “I— It’s just an emergency! Please just come!”

Wilbur was upset too. Oh no. It wasn’t good to have Wilbur to be upset. Tommy didn’t want to analyze another poem.

“Wilbur,” Tommy called out. He needed to make sure Wilbur hadn’t given him any more work out of spite. “I know you’re mad, but please don’t make me write an essay about that guy who had sex with his mom.”

Wilbur let out a shaky laugh. “I promise I am not mad at all. And don’t worry, you won’t have to write anything about Oedipus ever again.”

“Good... I wasn’t really good at writing essays. I thought I was good at listening, but I never listened to you,” Tommy felt salt water soak his ears. “I’m really sorry that I never listened.”

“No,” Wilbur shook his head as his voice wavered, “You don’t need to apologize. Please don’t apologize. It isn’t you.”

“Maybe I just started,” Tommy murmured. Everything in his sight slightly vibrated and Tommy shut his eyes. His friends might not like it, but maybe he could just rest for a little—

“Tommy! I need you to keep talking okay?” Wilbur burst as he squeezed Tommy’s hand tightly. He forced his eyes to open again.

Or was it Ranboo? Tommy couldn’t tell. He couldn’t really feel anything anymore. Or maybe he was just feeling so much. So much pressure. So much pain.

“Okay...” Tommy mumbled. “I’m really good at that.”

“Yeah, you are,” Ranboo softly chuckled. However, his four eyebrows were furrowed in worry. Tommy’s vision was going in and out of focus. Ranboo had no reason to be worried though. He didn’t like that his friend was worried.

“Hey Ran- ugh,” Tommy attempted to turn to him, but a splitting stab immediately stopped him.

“Hey, hey. Please don’t move. You just need to wait a bit longer okay?” Ranboo reassured. He cared about his friend, but Tommy really hated waiting. He was exhausted from waiting.

“Can you do something for me Ranboo?” Tommy inquired. He attempted to squeeze the hand that held his but instead, it just went limp. His body was in no shape to listen to him.

“Anything, man,” Ranboo nodded earnestly.

Tommy took a breath in, his lungs stung as they inflated with the new air. “Please tell Tubbo I’m sorry.”

“What?” Ranboo faltered.

“I was a pretty shitty friend to him. Just tell him that I’m sorry that I couldn’t see the stars with him again. We didn’t get the time.”

“No, no, no,” Ranboo sped through his words. “Tommy, you can tell him that yourself! I promise! You just need to stay awake for a little bit longer!”

Tommy could feel his eyes dropping. He was just so tired. But he also didn’t want his friend to worry.

“It’s okay, Ranboo. You can go with him. Just remember, the stars in Logsteadshire are the prettiest ones.”

“I bet they are! But that doesn’t mean you can’t come with us! Right, Tommy?” Ranboo pleaded. “You’re going to come with us, right?”

Tommy ignored the question. He went on, “I’m sorry I was a shitty friend to you too. I wish I wasn’t so mean to you. You’re actually super nice.”

“I forgive you, Tommy! But you’re going to be okay, okay? So please don’t give up on me. I need you to stay awake!”

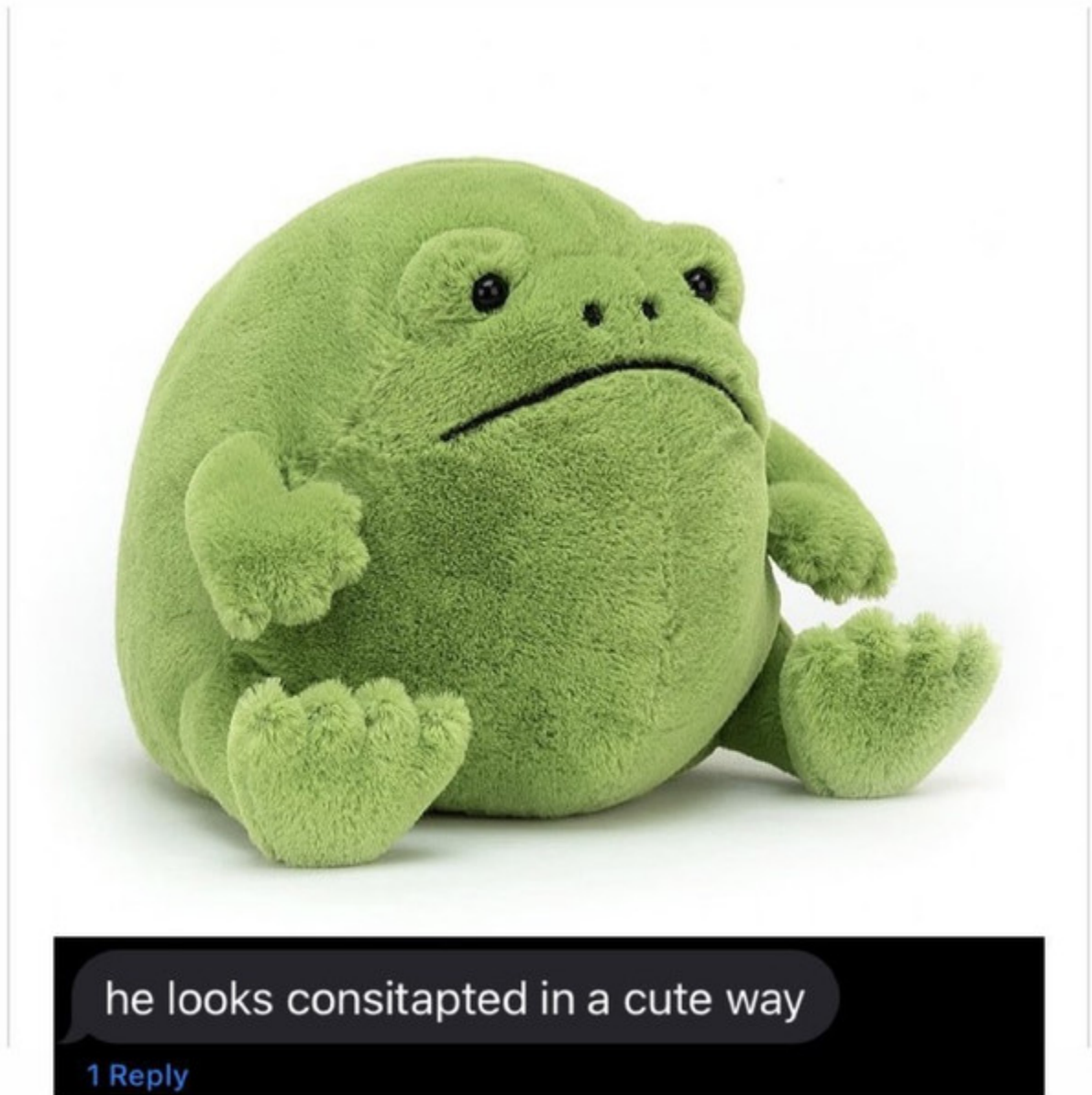
“Tommy! Keep your eyes open!” Wilbur’s voice entered again, but it was far away. He wished he could listen to his teacher, but his body was uncontrollable.

His friends now were just a pile of blobs. It was time to let his mind rest. He allowed the haze to fill in the rest of his sight. All he wanted to do was go home. Back to simple. ***Back to nothing.***

“I’m really sorry,” Tommy whispered as his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Finally, everything slipped into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Here is my apology:



[remember to read the tags too! :D]

Here are all the links to my various social medias! You can discuss and ask questions in any of these places!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #19: Time Syrup isn't that Great tbh

Chapter Summary

Tommy wakes up.

Chapter Notes

tw // mentions of needles, dissociative/intrusive thoughts (both are very minor tho!)

(also please forgive any spelling/grammar mistakes!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Here he was again. The void.

The nothingness. The darkness.

He couldn't see. He couldn't feel. He couldn't do anything.

The last time he was here, he hated the emptiness, the lack of everything.

But this time was different. He didn't mind the void. The void was quiet. Tommy needed some quiet.

He didn't remember why he needed quiet, but it seemed right. Tommy didn't have a body in the void, but if he did then he would feel super relaxed.

It's nice, isn't it? His own voice echoed throughout the void.

Tommy felt confused. Was that him? But he was himself. So how could that be him? If Tommy had a brain in the void, it would hurt.

We could have this all the time, forever.

Tommy did like the quiet. But he didn't know if he would like it forever. Forever is a long time.

This is for the best. Why do you still fight?

It was a good question. Tommy didn't know why he was fighting anymore. He just wanted some time in the quiet. He wanted to go back to normal.

But we can't go back. We've done too much. It's useless. We must start over. We will get rid of everything.

But Tommy didn't want to start over. His friends would be mad if he started over. They had a ton of things. Tommy didn't want to get rid of their stuff.

Why do you keep holding on to them? They have done nothing for you. All they have done is use you and then toss you aside like garbage. We are not garbage. We are powerful.

They didn't do that. They were his friends. They wouldn't do that.

No one will ever hurt us again.

Tommy liked that. He hated being in pain.

So why are you holding us back?

Even though Tommy didn't like being in pain, he didn't want to hurt people. He was a good guy.

Do not lie. We are powerful.

Tommy wasn't lying. He was a good person. He helped people.

Do not lie. We are powerful.

Tommy was a good person! He had to be.

Do not lie. We are powerful.

Tommy had to be a good person because if he wasn't a good person then what was he? He couldn't be the problem. He just couldn't. He couldn't.

This is who we are. You cannot resist it.

What was he even fighting? Himself? If this is who he was then what option did he have?

We can make it stop. We are powerful. Stop holding back.

That couldn't be it. There had to be more options.

We can end it all. We are powerful. Stop holding back.

But Tommy didn't want to end it. What about everyone else?

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

But what about Tubbo?

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

What about Ranboo?

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

Or Phil?

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

Techno?

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

Wilbur? They were his friends. He liked his friends.

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

But-

We are powerful. Stop holding back.

Stop holding back.

Stop holding back.

Stop holding back.

Stop holding b-

—

“Ack!” Tommy jolted up as a sharp pain shot through his arm. His whole body ached in pain at the sudden movement. His eyes squinted in the soft light to see a plain hospital room surrounding him.

“Sorry about that,” An unfamiliar voice said beside him. Tommy twisted around to find a goofy-looking man with square glasses and a white doctor's coat. He smiled as he lifted his hands from the IV he had just put into Tommy's arm.

The stench of cleaning products instantly filled his nose and he remembered how much he hated hospitals. Fuck. Was he in a hospital right now? No. No. He couldn't be in a hospital. He had been in his vigilante gear when the rebar had— *shit* .

“Is this heaven?” Tommy asked with wide eyes.

“What? No, you are not in heaven. You're in Las Nevadas, Vigilante of L'Manburg. Well more like, underneath the Las Nevadas Casino.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “Hell is underneath a casino?”

The goofy man let out a laugh. “You are not dead, Vigilante of L’Manburg.”

“But didn’t I— wait,” Tommy stared at his rod-less gut with disbelief, “did I dream that I got shish-kebab-ed?”

“Oh no, you definitely got ‘shish-kebab-ed.’ You were lucky that you were unconscious when we pulled that sucker out of you, Vigilante of L’Manburg,” the man rose to his feet, walked over to the trash can, and threw out his gloves. “But it was nothing a bit off goop couldn’t fix.”

“What the fuck is goop?”

“Oh! Wilbur of The Syndicate said you had used it before,” The man turned and pulled something from one of the cabinets that lined the side wall.

Wilbur of The Syndicate. Oh yeah. Wilbur was Shockwave. Tommy slightly wished that part had been a dream more than the impaling.

“It’s not exactly goop, but I just like calling it that,” the man continued as he lifted a glass vial. It was just like the healing gel the Syndicate had given him before. “Plus saying ‘my spit’ is not as appealing to people.”

Tommy blinked. “I’m sorry. Your *what?* ”

“Did Wilbur of The Syndicate not tell you? The healing solution is my spit! My snot sometimes heals too but it does not work as well,” the man replied with a smile.

...

where the fuck was he?

“Okay, I think I’m going to go now,” Tommy said as he carefully took out the IV and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. He ignored the black spots that dotted his vision.

“Vigilante of L’Manburg I would highly advise against—” the man started as he reached out to stop Tommy.

“I’m assuming that Wilbur of The Syndicate also told you about my powers, right?” Tommy interrupted. “If you touch me, I’ll make sure you won’t move from this spot for the next 3 hours.”

The man held his hands up in defense and Tommy didn’t spare him a glance as he pushed open the door. He exited to an empty hallway and quickly looked in both directions for an escape. To his dismay, both ends of the hallway looked the same. He didn’t have fucking time for this. He spun to his right and walked as fast as he could (which wasn’t very fast). His body ached for him to stop.

He needed to find Tubbo and Ranboo and get the hell out of there. They still needed to deal with the Egg and Dream. Fuck. Shadow also had him on the watch list. Had his head always been throbbing this much? He just needed to focus on one thing at a time and make a plan. He was good at plans. He loved following plans. Plus he was great at making them. He was also super great at convincing himself about things. He totally believed that he could do this. Yep. Yes. Mhm. He most definitely wasn't thinking about how he was absolutely, completely, astoundingly *fucked* –

Tommy turned the corner and full-body slammed into someone.

“Ugh!” He yelped as he stumbled back.

“Oh Prime! I am so sorr– *Tommy?* ” a familiar voice came from the person he had just run into.

A wave of relief seeped into his tight muscles as he found Ranboo looking at him with a surprised expression. He wasn't wearing his mask but still had his purple cape draped over his shoulders. Tommy immediately grabbed Ranboo's wrist and pushed the two of them behind the corner. He swiveled his head to make sure the coast was clear.

Ranboo didn't even attempt to lower his voice as he continued, “Tommy! Thank Prime you're awake! But when–”

Tommy cut him off with a shush. He then whispered harshly, “What the fuck are you doing?! Do you want to get caught? We need to find Tubbo and get the fuck out of here!”

“What? Why would we need to get out of here?” Ranboo looked at him like Tommy was the one talking nonsense.

“Because we've been fucking kidnapped!? We need to fucking leave– ah!” Suddenly one of his knees gave out and Tommy stumbled forward. His body wasn't understanding the urgency of the situation.

Ranboo grabbed him before he completely crumpled to the floor. “Tommy, you should go back to your bed. You're in no condition to be walking around yet!”

Tommy ignored his roommate's concerns as he snapped back, “We need to find Tubbo! We don't know what these fuckers are going to do to us!”

“Tubbo is fine! I just visited him!” Ranboo blurted, but then he let out a sigh before continuing in a calm tone, “I get that you're confused, but we are safe here. I promise.”

Tommy hesitated as his anxiety wrapped around his lungs. He wanted to believe Ranboo, but every hair on his body was standing on end. He gripped Ranboo's forearm as he stuttered, “B-But what about Dream? What if he finds us and–”

“Pff! As if that Green Giant Wannabe could ever find you here,” A new voice scoffed behind him.

Tommy twisted around and locked eyes with a man wearing a nice button shirt and pants with a pair of maroon suspenders. Contrary to his nice attire, his dark hair was covered by a navy beanie. The weirdest thing about the man is that he looked incredibly similar to Tommy's Spanish Teacher: Mr. Quackity.

Tommy's head was pounding. However, the last time Tommy checked was that Mr. Quackity didn't have a scar that cut over his left eye.

"Shit," Tommy cursed under his breath. His hold on his roommate tightened. "Ranboo, we need to—"

"It's okay! He's here to help!" Ranboo interrupted.

The Spanish teacher lookalike crossed his arms. "Well, I don't know how much I can help if Tommy keeps threatening my employees."

Tommy flinched. He could still feel his mask around his eyes. So how did this guy know his name? He tried to back up, but his legs were continuing to be unresponsive.

Ranboo continued, "Tommy, let's just get back to your room and—"

"What the fuck is the point of a fucking mask if everyone keeps on telling people my secret identity?! Does anyone know what '*secret*' even means!?" Tommy spat out. His legs were shaking, either from the strain or anxiety. He wasn't sure which.

Ranboo raised his eyebrow. "Tommy... I know you just woke up but—"

"Wilbur walked into my casino with one of my students, a powerless sidekick, and a half-dead vigilante. Not to mention that same student and his two roommates have been nowhere to be seen for the past 48 hours. It wasn't hard to connect the dots."

Oh. *fuck*.

This guy didn't just look like his Spanish teacher.

This guy *was* his Spanish teacher.

Tommy's voice was quiet. "Mr. Quackity?"

His teacher raised his hand to his face and the scar on his eye started to fade away. After a few seconds, it completely disappeared, and looking back at Tommy was a face that gave him a D+ on his final '*examen*.'

"Quackity is just fine," he replied. He then raised his eyebrows, "Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Ranboo, have you finished your final yet?"

Ranboo's face turned red as he stuttered, "Oh- wait- you were serious—"

A smirk crawled across their teacher's face.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “He’s fucking with you, Ranboo.”

“Oh!” Ranboo laughed awkwardly at the miscommunication.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Quackity apologized with his hands up in defense. “I’m not that mean. Wilbur, on the other hand—”

Tommy was not in the mood to talk about his other supervillain teacher. Actually, Tommy was not in the mood to talk about anything. He simply wanted to find Tubbo and get the hell out of there. He interrupted, “Thank you for all your help, Mr. Quackity, but—”

“Just Quackity.”

“Fuck! I don’t give a shit!” His pulse was roaring in his ears. “I don’t care about your fucking double life! I don’t care about Phil! I don’t care about Techno! And I *sure as fuck* don’t care about Mr. Wilbur fucking Soot! We don’t have time for this! I need to find Tubbo and get the fuck out of— ugh!”

His legs suddenly buckled, losing the ability to hold his weight anymore. His shoulder slammed into the wall before Ranboo could grab him from hitting the floor. However, Tommy didn’t even notice as he wheezed, trying to get air into his lungs. His heart was rattling in his chest and the edges of his vision were fading to black.

~~The pressure was suffocating him. It was going to kill him. He was going to die.~~

Fuck. Fuck. *Fuck.*

~~The concrete was pushing into his spine. His arms were shaking against the pressure of gravity.~~

He was fine. He simply needed to breathe. He didn’t have time for this. He squeezed his eyes shut as they began to burn.

~~A screaming pain enveloped his body. Warm blood dripped down his back. His blood. His blood. It was everywhere. Everywhere. He was dying.~~

Tommy gripped his head, his nails digging into his scalp. Everything was just so loud. He wanted it to be quiet **again. Forever.** His lungs continued to spasm, losing any oxygen that entered them. Just breathe. Just breathe. Just fucking breathe. *Why won’t he just fucking breathe—*

A familiar soft hum vibrated against his chest.

His headache was immediately soothed as his heart naturally began to follow along with the pulse.

A calm voice echoed in his mind, “Let it in slowly. You’re okay.”

Tommy winced. He knew the voice was Wilbur. Wilbur was the only one who could do this. ~~Wilbur was the only one who could shatter his eardrums too.~~ He hated how his body felt so

relaxed. He needed to be alert. He needed to fight. However, his mind was too tired to attempt to resist the comforting murmur. He let a stream of fresh air fill his lungs as his thoughts began to clear the haze.

“...et...way...om...me...” Tommy slurred as he slowly gained control of his body again. He cracked open his eyes, squinting in the fluorescent light. He could barely make the outlines of multiple people surrounding him.

“You need something, Tommy?” Wilbur’s voice was gentle. Tommy raised his hand and placed it on the villain’s hand.

Then,

He ripped Wilbur’s hand away from his chest and spat, “Get away from me.”

Tommy pushed himself up with quite a bit of labor. His body betrayed his mind as it longed for the comfort of the hum. As he rose, multiple voices let out a chorus of worry.

Through a clenched jaw, Tommy snapped, “I’m fine! Fuck off!”

His eyes were adjusted to the light now as Ranboo helped him balance. Concern was etched on his roommate’s face as he begged, “Will you please go back to your room now?”

Tommy glanced across the hallway. He grimaced at the sight of his former English teacher standing next to Quackity. Wilbur twisted his fingers together, keeping his eyes on the ground. On the other hand, Quackity furrowed his eyebrows together as his eyes switched between Wilbur and Tommy.

The Spanish teacher stated, “Damn, Tommy. Why the hell are you being so hostile? He was just trying to help—”

“I never fucking asked for your help!” Tommy cut him off.

Annoyance spread across Quackity’s face as he opened his mouth to answer, but Wilbur spoke first, “It’s fine. He’s right. We need to respect his boundaries.”

A few beats passed before Quackity let out a sigh. He conceded, “I don’t really give a shit. Just go back to your room. I’m not against sedating you if you keep fucking around.”

“I want to see Tubbo,” Tommy said loudly. “Then I’ll go back.”

“Did you get more fucking stubborn since the last time I talked to you?” Quackity asked in disbelief.

“Ranboo visited him! I want to see him too!” Tommy retorted.

Quackity turned towards his fellow educator, “Wilbur if you don’t knock him out, I will.”

Wilbur frowned. “Quackity, I’m not—”

“If either of you touches me,” Tommy’s voice began to rise, “I’ll fucking KILL—”

“Tommy!” Ranboo twisted him away from the others. Tommy continued to stare daggers at the worst fucking teachers in the world as his roommate continued, “I promise you will see Tubbo! He isn’t awake yet though, so there’s not much to see.”

Tommy’s gut twisted at the thought of Tubbo still being under the control of that stupid plant. He pleaded, “*Please*. I need to see him.”

Ranboo paused before letting out a sigh. “Okay, we can go visit. And then you’ll lay down?”

Tommy gave a quick nod as a reply. He was clenching his teeth together to keep them from chattering. Maybe if he saw Tubbo his anxiety would stop making him shiver.

Ranboo then turned towards the teachers and calmly stated, “I promise I’ll make him lie down after we visit.”

Quackity crossed his arms. “Listen, I don’t really care where you go. As long as you stop sneaking around. I can’t have a bunch of kids disrupting my business.”

“We’ll be around if you need anything,” Wilbur added, his eyes avoiding Tommy’s. However, it wasn’t like Tommy was making any effort to look at the villain either.

Ranboo hummed in understanding. Tommy didn’t resist as his roommate placed his arm over his shoulder and the two of them made their way around the corner. He had no interest in the harsh whispers that continued as they left.

—

The walk to Tubbo’s room wasn’t very long, but by the time they got there, Ranboo was practically dragging Tommy. He attempted to decrease his gravity to help alleviate some of the weight, but his powers were still pretty unreliable. It was clear his body needed more rest, but Tommy didn’t care. He needed to see his roommate. His central command. His friend. His best friend.

They hobbled to a door that looked exactly like the one that Tommy had exited during his escape attempt. Ranboo pushed it open and Tommy immediately felt his muscles relax in relief. He had to grip Ranboo’s cape to keep from falling to the floor again as he took in the room.

It looked exactly like the one he had woken up in. There were a few cabinets that matched the rest of the pale room. There were a set of medical machines on each side of the bed that beeped in a harmonic beat. However, Tommy’s eyes were locked in on the sole occupant of the hospital bed. Tubbo.

Tommy breathed in sharply. Tubbo's chest slowly rose and fell, in the same way when Blade—Techno—had taken him away from the fight. His brown bangs brushed over his closed eyes as a quilted blanket covered his body up to his neck. At a glance, it simply looked like his roommate was taking a nap after a long shift at the lab.

“When do they think he'll wake up?” Tommy asked, keeping his voice level.

“He actually first woke up a little bit after we arrived, but...” Ranboo's eyes fell to his feet as if he could find the words he was looking for in the grout around the tiles, “but he was still...”

“Under the influence of that stupid plant,” Tommy finished sourly. After everything, after fighting possession, after fighting his old boss, after getting a whole ass building dropped on him, Tommy still had failed to free Tubbo from the Egg. They may be under a casino, but this also was definitely in his own version of hell.

Ranboo nodded. “Mr. Soot used his powers to knock him out a few times, but after a while, it stopped working.” He then raised his head and Tommy followed his gaze to the IV next to the bed. Tommy felt his arm tingle at the thought of the needle in his arm. Ranboo softly continued, “By then Tubbo was getting so angry that Quackity had his healer sedate him.”

“Oh.” Tommy's gut turned at the thought of Tubbo screaming again. His red eyes had been filled with so much rage. Rage aimed directly at Tommy.

It felt like a lifetime since Tommy had seen Tubbo. His heart ached to hear his friend chatter away about chemical compounds and biological evolutions again. His fingers rolled the edge of the loose t-shirt he was wearing. They had changed him out of his vigilante gear. He wondered if they had cut his red sweatshirt again to dress his injuries like his last night as a vigilante after Tubbo had dragged him to the hospital. It's not like Tommy could use it anymore. The metal rod had ripped right through it. ~~*Just like Tommy.*~~

The lack of cotton on his arms resulted in them being covered in goosebumps instead. The adrenaline that had pulled him out of his hospital bed had finally run cold and Tommy was left shivering. The last time he was in a room like this with his best friend, Tubbo had shown him designs for a new vigilante suit. Tubbo had been going on about Tommy's ability to use gloves with his powers. Tommy wrapped his cold fingers between the shirt. He could definitely use some gloves now.

“Mr. Soot said that he had an idea on how to snap him out of it, but he had to make some calls first,” Ranboo continued. “But that's all that happened since you were out. We were mostly waiting for you to wake up.”

Tommy replied with a nod. His whole body was throbbing with a soft ache as he eyed a chair in the corner of the room. He released his grip on Ranboo and staggered towards the seat. It loudly scratched the floor as he pulled it right up next to the hospital bed.

“I don't know why I believed that you would go back,” Ranboo said as Tommy sat down breathlessly. He had been in more uncomfortable chairs in his life, but his body missed the feeling of a soft bed.

Tommy shook the thought away as he replied, “We barely made it here. There was no way I could make it back anyways.”

“I could go grab you a wheelchair and we can head back. You need to rest.”

Tommy’s eyes landed on Tubbo’s peaceful face and the guilt made his mouth go dry. “I left him behind twice.”

“That wasn’t your fault though—”

Tommy cut him off, but there was no malice in it. The pain was painted on Tommy’s face for all the see. “I’m not leaving him. I can’t. Not again.”

A few seconds passed and the only sounds in the air were the steady beats of Tubbo’s heart monitor.

Ranboo let out a soft sigh. “Well, at least I won’t have to run between two rooms when I visit.” Instantly Ranboo’s eyes went wide as he started to scramble for words, “Well— If you want— I know you want space! So I don’t need to— like it’s all up to you! I don’t have— like I completely understand— I won’t visit if you don’t want me to...”

“Why wouldn’t I want you to visit?” Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. “Are you not staying?”

This seemed to take Ranboo by surprise. He replied with a soft voice, “Well, I wasn’t really sure... you know... since you didn’t really like it when Mr. Soot was around.”

Tommy frowned. That wasn’t true. It wasn’t like he *didn’t* want to be around Wilbur... he also just didn’t want to see him or hear his voice or—ugh—Tommy’s brain hurt. It couldn’t handle all these questions and contradictions right now. He wasn’t in the mood to battle his emotions about everything that had happened. He simply wanted to focus on Tubbo.

“Well, good thing you’re not Mr. Soot then, right?” Tommy attempted a smile. “Tubbo would want you here anyways. It only makes sense we all get stuck in the same room. We’re roommates, remember?”

“You’re not wrong,” Ranboo chuckled as he grabbed the last empty chair and placed it on the other side of the bed, across from Tommy.

Once again an awkward silence fell between the two of them. Tommy drummed his fingers on his knees to the beat of the heart monitor. The quiet wasn’t unfamiliar to either of them. Less than three days ago— had it really only been three days?— Ranboo and Tommy were awkwardly studying biology together. They were used to tiptoeing around conversation topics so Tommy had absolutely no problem falling back into their routine of ignoring their issues with each other. They were simply roommates. There was no need to push for anything more than that. And Tommy had no problem with that. He had no problem with no longer wanting to be friends with Ranboo. It’s not like Ranboo was really even his friend to start with. Ranboo was just doing his job. His job of being Dream’s—

Tommy snapped his head up. “Oh shit! Ranboo!”

“What?!” Ranboo’s face was filled with confusion. “What’s wrong?!”

“Your powers! They– ” Tommy dropped his head in shame. He had been so occupied with his own problems that he hadn’t even remembered that Ranboo had lost his powers in the fight until now. “I’m so sorry, Ranboo...”

“My powers are fine! Don’t worry!” Ranboo replied and relief washed through Tommy. For a second, Tommy had thought that Dream had taken Ranboo’s powers for good. “I tested them out a few hours after the fight and they worked just like normal. If Dream actually does have the ability to steal powers then it wears off just like his copying power.”

Tommy clasped his hands together as a frown formed on his face. “I can’t believe that bastard could potentially have two powers. It’s insane to even imagine.”

“I have a hard time believing anything about Dream lately.”

Tommy opened his mouth, ready to rub it in that he had been right about their old boss being a horrible person. However, when he looked up Ranboo was hunched over, picking at his cape. Tommy paused. There was no use in breaking their temporary peace. Ranboo had been tricked and thrown aside, just like Tommy.

Instead, he replied softly, “Yeah, I get that.”

“Yeah...”

“Mhm...”

As the heart rate monitor filled the air again, Tommy began tracing the stitches of the quilt on the bed with his eyes. His brain enjoyed the simple task of following the lines, over and over again. Just a simple direction, just one path to go through. He could follow a different stitch, but that would only cause everything to get complicated. He would never know if he could get back to where he started and that’s the last thing he wanted. He didn’t want to be lost anymore. He was tired of being confused. But every time he thought he was going to the right way he was turned around again. It was like every time he came to a fork in the stitches, he always chose the wrong one. He always made the wrong choice. No, it wasn’t just the choices. It was him. He was wrong. ~~**Everything was wrong and everything needed to be destroy**~~

“Are we really not going to talk about it?” Ranboo’s voice broke him away from his thoughts.

“What’s there to talk about?” Tommy asked.

“Don’t do this. We have to talk about it.”

Tommy felt his nails dig into his thighs as he tiredly went on, “That’s just the thing though. We actually don’t have anything to talk about. You were just doing your job, Ranboo. I get it. There’s nothing else to discuss.”

Ranboo furrowed his eyebrows. “Are you not... mad?”

“I’m tired,” the blonde pinched the bridge of his nose. “I’m tired of being mad. I’m tired of being surprised. I’m tired of being lied to. I’m just tired of everything.”

“But—”

“Just drop it. It’s fine. I know—”

“But it’s not fine! ” Ranboo cut him off sharply. Surprise was plastered on Tommy’s face as he pressed on, “What we did to you was wrong. What *I* did was wrong... And I need to apologize.”

“I promise—”

Ranboo interrupted again, but his voice was calm this time, “Please just let me do this”

Tommy reluctantly sighed. “Okay...”

“I never wanted you to find out any of this like this. After our first meeting as Ender and Vigilante, Dream told me everything. He ordered me to be friends with you and at first, that’s all it was...an act. But then somewhere along the line...” Ranboo dropped his eyes to the quilt. “I actually started to see you as my friend... I am so sorry that I lied to you.”

Tommy shifted uncomfortably. “It’s really okay. We both did shitty things...”

“You calling me weird nicknames is nothing compared to me backstabbing you!”

“But you were doing your job, I was just being mean to you for no reason!”

“That’s not an excuse! I knew it was wrong! I just stood by and let Dream say all those awful things about you! I should’ve done something, but instead, I just did nothing!” Ranboo’s voice got quiet. “This whole time I thought we were doing the right thing... I thought I was helping...”

Maybe Tommy wasn’t the only one who had gotten lost.

“He’s really convincing. He even acts like he cares sometimes,” Tommy noted in a flat tone.

Ranboo dragged his hands down his face. “I’m just disappointed in myself. I didn’t even question him once.”

“Cut yourself some slack. He’s a manipulative egomaniac. His whole thing is to make us feel bad about ourselves. Don’t let him have the satisfaction,” Tommy replied. Maybe if he kept on saying it out loud then he would believe those words too.

His roommate shook his head. “My point is that you didn’t deserve all of this. I don’t know what happened with Mr. Soot and the rest of the Syndicate, but we all should’ve been more honest with you.”

Tommy let out a breath. His lungs felt a bit more open now with the tension no longer squeezing them. He gave a soft smile as he replied, “Thank you, Ranboo.”

But then,

Tommy lifted his foot, slipped off one of his socks, balled it up, and chucked it straight at Ranboo's face. Tommy's aim was a bit off as the sock ball bounced into Ranboo's shoulder and Ranboo yelped, "What the heck was that for?!"

"You lied to me for months, Ran-boob! Not to mention you told Tubbo your secret identity before me! You deserve to be hit with my socks!"

Ranboo raised his hands in defense. "I didn't tell Tubbo anything! He figured it out all by himself!"

"You didn't tell him?" Tommy stopped taking off his other sock. His chest tightened at a new and uncomfortable thought. "Wait... I know Dream told you about me, but did Tubbo ever tell you that I was Vigilante?"

"No! Never! I honestly didn't even realize he knew you were Vigilante until we got kidnapped. He only ever spoke to me about being Ender, I promise."

Tommy felt his chest relax and he forced himself to take a deep breath in and out. At this point, his brain was making up extra stuff to stress himself out. After a few beats, Tommy glanced at his unconscious roommate with a smirk, "He probably loved the fact that he could be a little smartass with all his secrets."

"If he liked those secrets, imagine his reaction to the stuff we have for him when he wakes up," Ranboo smiled.

"Oh yeah, he's going to lose his mind about Mr. Quackity being the owner of Las Nevadas."

"I do hope Vigilante of L'Manburg and Ranboo of Visions Academy are not the ones losing their minds. My goop cannot fix that," a familiar friendly voice suddenly entered the conversation.

Tommy started to float a bit due to the surprise, but he quickly grounded himself again to the chair. The goofy-looking man (that Tommy had threatened) stood at the door with a confused look. Before he could question his presence, Ranboo explained, "Oh it's just a joke, Charlie. We promise we won't lose our minds anytime soon."

The man—Charlie—immediately laughed, "I don't get it, but I love jokes."

Tommy shot a questioning look at Ranboo, but his roommate continued, "Did you need something? Sorry, I didn't tell you yet, but I think Vigilante is going to stay in this room with our friend."

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. "Wait, why are you keeping my identity a secret from this guy?"

"Well, you do have a mask for a reason," Ranboo pointed out. "We all agreed that we would let you decide if you wanted to take it off."

“But Quackity knew who I was? Didn’t he see me without the mask?”

Ranboo scratched his head. “Quackity only saw Tubbo’s face until I revealed who I was to him. But at that point, he had put the pieces together. However, everyone else here doesn’t know your identity. Mr. Soot, Blade, and Angel wanted you to be able to choose.”

Even when he had been injured and bleeding, they all were still worried about Tommy’s identity being revealed to people who didn’t know who he was. Tommy didn’t know how to feel about this. All he could muster out was, “Oh.”

“It is okay if you do not want me to see your face, Vigilante of L’Manburg,” Charlie remarked. “I am not here for your face. I am here to take your vitals.”

“That makes sense,” Tommy voiced softly, ignoring the jumble of emotions that bounced around his skull. “Some people say my face is not pleasant.”

“Those people are wrong, Vigilante of L’Manburg,” Charlie said as he placed a band around his arm and clipped a small device on his finger. “Your face seems like one of the nice ones.”

“Well, I don’t know about—”

“But it is also still ugly enough that people do not want to steal it,” Charlie continued with a smile.

Tommy frowned at the sound of Ranboo stifling his laughter.

“My face is very stealable!” Tommy countered, slipping his mask off his face with his free hand. “Look! All the ladies ever want to do is steal this face!”

“Do you *want* people to steal your face?” Ranboo asked.

“Sorry, Vigilante of L’Manburg, but I do not know if your face is stealable. I doubt people would even want to take your skin in general,” Charlie shrugged as the devices he held beeped.

“People would be lucky to have my skin!” Tommy exclaimed.

“Shouldn’t you be happy that people don’t want your skin?” Ranboo pressed.

“According to your vitals, you are doing very well, Vigilante of L’Manburg. However, I recommend getting some food and liquids in your system to help with your recovery. I can have some soup brought for you if you don’t think you can handle solid food.”

The thought of having food in his reconstructed stomach made Tommy queasy. He shook his head as he answered, “I am okay for now. If I get hungry I’ll have Ranboo get me something. Thanks, Charlie.”

The healer nodded in response before heading for the door. Tommy then called out, “Oh, I don’t think I ever told you my name. Vigilante of L’Manburg is a bit of a mouthful. You can call me just Tommy.”

“Okay! I will visit again when I check in on Tubbo The Friend. See you soon, Just Tommy and Ranboo of Visions Academy!” And with a wave, Charlie slipped out of the door.

“Well, that guy was really weird,” Tommy said in a low voice as the door clicked closed.

Ranboo raised his eyebrow. “That’s rich coming from the guy who wants people to steal his face.”

“I’m going to steal deez n—” A sock ball smacked Tommy in the face.

—

Time was weird in the hospital— or recovery clinic as Ranboo always reminded him. However, this ‘recovery clinic’ looked like a hospital, smelled like a hospital, and gave Tommy the same ick as a hospital so in his eyes, it was a hospital. It felt a bit nostalgic sitting in a space where time flowed like syrup. It reminded him of his times at the foster agency lobby, waiting for a new family to pick him up as if he wouldn’t be back in the lobby a month later.

Ironically, sometimes he would be in that lobby with Tubbo. That was actually where they first met. Back then though, time didn’t feel as suffocating. His leg bounced in beat with the chirps of the heart rate monitor.

Before the time felt like being enveloped in jello, Ranboo explained that Tommy had only been unconscious for a few hours after Charlie had healed him. Tommy would have asked a few questions about... the others... However, he wasn’t really in the mood to bring them up. His mind was comfortable in the lull of the hospital time limbo. But after a few more awkward silences, it seemed like Ranboo also didn’t want to talk about the fact that both of them had almost died in the past 48 hours.

So instead they fell back into their normal routine of small talk. They thought of excuses they could give the school for being absent. Ranboo worried about missing his math and science finals. They discussed ways to make it up to Aimsey for missing their study group session for the past two days.

Their conversation filled the air accompanied by the heart rate monitor for an unknown amount of time. However, the whole time, Tommy found himself watching the door. It was cream-colored with a skinny rectangular vertical window in the middle. There was nothing special about it. Yet Tommy couldn’t stop staring at it as if he was waiting for something—someone—to come through it.

The one time it opened, his breath caught in his throat. It had only been Charlie checking in again and when he left, Tommy couldn’t shake the unsatisfying feeling that rested in his ribs.

As the time dropped by in globs, Tommy tried his best to keep up with his roommate, but it soon was clear that the heaviness of fatigue had entered his muscles.

Tommy leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, still hearing Ranboo's voice along with the beeps, but a fog slowly entered his mind. He murmured a few replies before he no longer could hear anything and his mind began to slip into the fog.

But Tommy didn't want to slip into the fog. He needed to be alert. He needed to know if something happened. ~~But something did happen.~~

The fog began to push down on his chest. *A piercing pain shot through his gut.*

It was filling his lungs, weighing them down. He wanted to breathe. He wanted to get away from the fog. ~~But everything was so heavy, pushing down on him. It was crushing him. He was going to die. He was going to die.~~

Tommy was frozen in place. He needed to move, but it didn't matter, it was just too heavy. He tried to scream, but the fog tightened around his throat. ~~There was so much pressure. Too much. He couldn't do this anymore.~~

He needed someone to hear him. They needed to help him. He needed help. Why wouldn't anyone help him? Where were they? Where did they go? Why did they leave him? ~~**He doesn't need them. He is strong. He is better without them. He is better without anything. Nothing matters. Nothing matters. Nothing matters.**~~

"-ommy! Tommy!" A voice suddenly filled his ears and Tommy jolted up.

His mind swam just as he sat up and a wave of nausea crashed over him. He couldn't stop the contents of his stomach from crawling up his throat. Luckily someone shoved a bucket into his arms just as he threw up any food that he had left inside of him.

After he had emptied his gut, his mind immediately became more clear. His tongue stung from the vomit as he looked up to find Phil and Ranboo kneeling on the ground next to him.

"You back with us, mate?" Phil asked cautiously.

Tommy nodded. His voice was raspy as he said, "What happened? Why are we on the ground?"

"You fell asleep a little bit ago, but then you fell to the ground and started to have a nightmare or something," Ranboo answered, his eyes still filled with worry. "I tried waking you up by myself, but it didn't work. When I called for help, Angel was the closest person."

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows as his mind slowly caught up with Ranboo's words. Then his eyes landed on Phil. He looked just as he always did with his dirty blond hair and matching scruff, but instead of wearing his usual bookstore attire of a button-down and jeans, he wore a black athletic shirt and cargo pants. However, the biggest difference was that a pair of dark wings protruded from his back. Oh yeah. Phil wasn't just the owner of the bookstore he was fired from. *Phil also was Angel.*

On the other hand, Phil didn't need to catch up. Without missing a beat, pushed himself up off the ground as he stated, "Ranboo, there should be water bottles in the cupboard over there. I will go get Charlie."

Instantly, anxiety squeezed Tommy's chest as he watched Phil turn his back on him. Before he could process his thoughts, his voice called out, "Wait!"

Phil paused before facing him with a confused look. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah, I just... umm..." Tommy trailed off.

Why did he ask Phil to stop? It wasn't like he cared if Phil was here or not. He was just another person who had lied to him. Another person who threw him aside and left him to deal with all his problems by himself. There was no reason Tommy should want to even be near him, let alone want to talk to him and ask him how he was doing. He shouldn't want to know if Wilbur and Techno were doing alright too. He was supposed to hate them for betraying him. *For leaving him.*

He squeezed his eyes shut as his brain throbbed along with the heart monitor.

"Do you need me to tell Charlie something specific?" Phil continued with concern in his eyes.

Tommy opened his eyes. The aching behind his chest returned at the thought of Phil leaving. He was supposed to send him away. He wasn't supposed to want him to stay. However, his mouth betrayed his mind as he replied, "I just- um- I realized I never gave you back your Tupperware. I left it in my dorm room."

Surprise washed over Phil's face for a second before settling with a soft smile. "It's alright, mate. You don't need to return—"

"But it's yours. I need to give it back," Tommy interrupted. Suddenly a great urge to return the plastic containers overcame his sore body. He turned to Ranboo as he attempted to stand up. "I need to go back and get them. Can I borrow your key for the dorm?"

Ranboo immediately stuck his hands out and grabbed onto Tommy's shaky arm as he replied, "Tommy, I don't think you should be going anywhere—"

"No," Apparently plastic containers were the things that his brain decided to lock on during his delirious state. Tommy gripped Ranboo's forearms, his legs were barely holding his weight again as he continued, "Phil needs his Tupperware. I left it and I never gave it back to him. I need to go get—"

"Hey, hey, Tommy," Phil appeared at his side and placed his hand on his shoulder. "We can go get the Tupperware together after your friend is awake. Does that sound like a good compromise? I don't want you leaving your friend while he's recovering."

Tommy glanced over at Tubbo who looked exactly as he did when Tommy had first walked in. *Fuck.* He had forgotten about the reason he was here in the first place. He couldn't leave

until Tubbo was back to normal. He shut his eyes as he felt the dizziness enter his vision again. His body wasn't really in the position to be swinging by his dorm room anyways.

After a few moments, Tommy nodded in response. Ranboo helped him get back to his seat as Phil began walking towards the door again. As Phil's hand grabbed the handle, the ache hummed behind Tommy's chest again.

"Are you going to come back with Charlie?" Tommy called out. What the hell was he doing? Why the fuck was he acting like he wanted to see him again? This man had lied to him and fought him multiple times.

Phil raised his eyebrows at the question. He then asked, "Do you want me to come back?"

Tommy fiddled with the hem of his shirt. He should be focusing on a way to help Tubbo. He didn't need to be stressing over people who he didn't care about. However, Tommy didn't have the slightest clue on how to help Tubbo at all. All he had been doing this entire time was sitting around, acting as if Tubbo was going to magically wake up without a stupid Egg possessing him. Shit. He didn't even have an idea.

But then Tommy remembered something convenient.

His voice was careful as he spoke, "Well, Ranboo mentioned that Wilbur had a plan to help Tubbo and I wanted to hear it... So you should come back and tell me about it... Wilbur and Techno should come too probably... So you guys can explain the plan to help Tubbo because... I want to hear it—yeah, um—so you should come back."

Tommy kept his eyes down as Phil replied, "You're right. I'll tell them to come in. They can start explaining as I go get Charlie."

The door clicked open and Tommy raised his head as he heard Phil's voice say, "I know you heard him. You can go inside."

Tommy and Ranboo shared a confused look as muffled whispers replied to Phil who was now standing in the doorway. Phil continued to speak to someone right outside the door saying, "No, I don't care what happened earlier. He says he wants to talk to you."

There was more mumbling before Phil threw his hands up and declared, "Go inside or I'm telling him how you found out his identity."

"Fine! I'm going!" Wilbur's voice finally came through. Their former teacher walked in with his hands stuffed into the pockets of his coat. He had cleaned up a significant amount from the last time Tommy had seen him (aka bleeding, bruised, and almost being crushed by a building), but the dark circles under his eyes and messy hair let Tommy know more than enough about his resting habits. He gave an awkward smile as he lifted a hand out of a pocket as a greeting.

"Don't make me blackmail you too, Techno," Phil said, crossing his arms.

“If I go, will you spill Wilbur’s secret?” Tommy’s former pink-haired coworker asked as he shuffled past Phil through the doorway. Techno also looked just as he did the last time Tommy saw him; in his black combat gear. However, there seemed to be a lack of weapons in his belt this time. He gave a slight nod as he lined up next to Wilbur.

“I’ll think about it. I know Tommy is going to love hearing it,” Phil said before turning his attention back to the teenagers. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

“Don’t you fucking dare, Phil!” Wilbur shouted back, but he got no response as the door clicked closed.

A few beats passed as the atmosphere of awkwardness spread across the room again. Ranboo handed Tommy a water bottle. He twisted open the top and chugged the bottle down, trying to get rid of the sour taste of bile on his tongue. Tommy silently wondered how long Wilbur and Techno had been hanging outside of his room.

“Thanks,” he said after finishing, crinkling the plastic in his hands.

“No problem. Do you need another one?” Ranboo asked.

“No, I think I’m okay.”

“Okay. Just let me know if you need one.”

“Sounds good.”

“Mhm.”

The two roommates’ stiff conversation seemed to be just the jumping-off point the newcomers needed to join the conversation. Techno was the next to speak as he entered with a monotone voice, “Good job at not dying.”

“Techno!” Wilbur snapped, glaring at his partner.

The swordsman shrugged. “What? He didn’t die. That’s a good thing.”

“He’s not wrong. I am pretty happy about that part.” Tommy agreed.

“I’m not disagreeing with him!” Wilbur’s face reddened as he fumbled over his words, “I was just saying— Well, what I meant was— It’s not that I’m not happy you’re not dead— fuck, did that even make any sense? Prime, I don’t know...” He combed his hair out of his face and sighed. As he moved his hair, Tommy noticed a scar that ran down the side of his forehead and cut into his eyebrow.

Wilbur was continuing to ramble, but Tommy interrupted, “Is your head okay?” as he gestured at his own head.

Wilbur paused for a moment, bringing his hand up to his temple before replying, “Oh, yeah! I’m totally fine. I had a slight concussion, but I’m alright now.”

“Good, good.” Tension crept back into the air, making him shift uncomfortably. No wonder Wilbur, Techno, and Phil had been avoiding him. This was unbearable.

Luckily, Ranboo knew how to push through when Tommy was falling short. His roommate questioned, “So you wanted to hear Wilbur’s plan on how to help Tubbo, right?”

“Yeah, I would,” Tommy nodded. He shot a look of gratitude at his roommate before bringing his attention back to his ex-coworkers. “Is that alright?”

“Of course!” Wilbur answered. “However, I will say though it’s less of a plan and more of an idea... So you know that night that you saved us from the heroes?”

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “Yeah, what about it?”

“Do you remember the time right before that when you interrupted our heist on Pandora Labs?”

Tommy definitely remembered how Wilbur almost destroyed his eardrums, but he decided to keep that to himself. Instead, Tommy crossed his arms and flatly remarked, “I’m confused about what that has to do with Tubbo’s condition.”

A guilty look washed over Wilbur’s face. “Sorry, I promise it is relevant. The reason we broke in that night was to get a prototype of a device that can neutralize powers.”

Now, this caught Tommy’s attention. Tubbo had once mentioned that there were rumors of a device that could stop powers, but Tommy didn’t think it had been so far developed that there was an actual machine. Tommy turned towards Ranboo. “Did you think this has to do with Dream’s second power?”

“I didn’t even know Pandora was making a device like that let alone how it connects to Dream,” Ranboo replied with a shrug.

“So I know you guys got away with the device,” Tommy continued, turning back to the criminals. Apparently, Tommy’s terrible vigilante skills actually came back to help him. Weird how life works like that. “But would a power neutralizer even stop the Egg from influencing Tubbo? And how do you even know if it works in general?”

“Don’t worry, it works,” Techno confirmed. “Our client let us know right after we gave it to her.”

“And based on Ranboo and Techno’s experiences with the Egg it seems like it using a form of mind control to infect its victims,” Wilbur added. “The neutralizer should stop any form of influence the Egg has on Tubbo by neutralizing the powers that are directly connecting him to the Egg, no matter the distance.”

Tommy pursed his mouth into a tight line. Wilbur’s idea sounded like it could work. They could bring Tubbo back to normal. For the first time in a long time, it seemed like there was going to be an end to this terrible string of unfortunate events. A chance for his life to go back to normal. Well as normal as it could be.

He let out a sigh before sitting up again with a serious look. “Well, it’s not like we have any other ideas. Where’s this power eliminator anyways?”

“Power neutralizer,” Ranboo corrected.

“Neutralize deez n– ehm,” Tommy cut himself off. He was supposed to be serious because this was a serious situation and he was a serious big man that could be very serious.

“Whatever. Where is it?”

Wilbur twisted his wrist, looking at his communicator. “Well, she said that she was on her way. She should’ve been here by now–”

A soft knock at the door cut him off. Everyone twisted to see the door open and Charlie’s head poked through as he exclaimed, “We have surprise gifts for Just Tommy! The surprise is soup!”

“Charlie, if you say what the surprise is then it’s no longer a surprise,” Phil said as he walked in after the healer.

“Whoops!” Charlie handed a bowl of some sort of chicken soup to Tommy on a plastic tray. “Sorry for spoiling your surprise soup. Well, the soup is not spoiled. It is a very good soup.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy chuckled and placed the tray on the small table next to him. “I’ll drink it in just a bit.”

Phil went on, “But we do have another surprise that might be better than soup.”

And then Tommy felt his brain short circuit as the last person he ever expected walked through the door.

“Hey, Tommy! Hi, Ranboo!” greeted the pink-haired baker that would give Tommy day-old cookies for free. She was the same baker that coated her muffins in the chunky sugar. She was the same baker that Tommy had saved the first day he decided to use his powers to help people.

“Niki?” Tommy and Ranboo’s voices blended together in disbelief.

“What are you doing here?” Tommy continued as Ranboo sat with his mouth agape.

Niki vaguely put her hands on his hips since one hand gripped a briefcase and the other was occupied by a paper bag. She turned towards Wilbur and asked, “Did you not tell them I was coming?”

Wilbur shrugged sheepishly. “We hadn’t gotten to that part yet.”

Tommy’s head fell into his hands. “How many fucking people do I know who are secretly criminals?”

“Bold of you to say, *Vigilante*,” Niki smirked.

Tommy felt his face heat up. He had slightly forgotten that Niki was the first to figure out his secret identity. Not that he was hiding it very well on that faithful day. There was only so much that green bandana hid.

“I’m still really confused,” Ranboo confessed. “Niki is the person who hired you guys to steal the prototype?”

“I *technically* didn’t hire the Syndicate to steal extremely rare and expensive technology for me. I’m a baker. I don’t have the money to pay for a job like that,” Niki explained.

“We were repaying you a favor,” Wilbur huffed.

Niki rolled her eyes with a smile. “Whatever you say, Wilbur. Long story short, they stole the prototype for me. As he mentioned, it was payment for helping them store their stolen contraband from the police and heroes.”

Wilbur furrowed his eyebrows. “It literally was!”

“You keep contraband at your bakery?” Ranboo cut in with wide eyes. Tommy probably matched his expression.

“No one really suspects an innocent little bakery of having stolen items in it. Plus it doesn’t hurt having a famous crime group protect your business,” Niki smirked. Tommy had to hand it to her, she was a very good businesswoman.

“Well, they did a shit job on the day that I stopped Jack,” Tommy pointed out, thinking about the thief-now-turned-employee who wore red and blue colored glasses and shot lasers from his eyes.

“Listen, usually thieves don’t try to rob places in broad daylight,” Wilbur countered. “It’s not our fault that dumbass decided to try to steal from us in the middle of the day!”

“Don’t blame, Jack. That was like his second time trying to steal something,” Niki defended.

“I will most definitely blame him!” Wilbur maintained.

“We’re lucky that Niki hired him before he made our lives worse,” Techno added.

Niki nodded in agreement, “He’s a terrible thief, but a great cashier.”

“I’m sorry, but I am still extremely lost,” Ranboo muttered, worry making his eyebrows crease together.

Charlie stepped up and placed a hand on Ranboo’s shoulder. “You are at Las Nevadas, Ranboo of Visions Academy. Are you experiencing short-term memory loss? Maybe you have a concussion.”

“I definitely feel like I have a concussion with how much shit you’re throwing at me,” Tommy mumbled as he rubbed his temples. The soreness in his body may have decreased, but all this new information was giving Tommy another headache.

Charlie perked up at Tommy's comment and began to say, "Oh, if you have a concussion it is best if you lie down—"

"I know I called you here, Charlie, but I think Tommy is feeling much better now," Phil interrupted as he gently started to push the healer away from Ranboo and towards the door. "Don't you agree that we should all leave Tommy and Ranboo to recover?"

"Oh yes, a quiet environment is great for recovery," Charlie agreed.

"Perfect! Wilbur. Techno. Come on, let's give them some space," Phil continued, following Charlie out the door.

"But—" Wilbur started, but Techno softly slapped his shoulder.

"Niki will stay with them. Let's go," Techno stated. Niki nodded with confirmation and Wilbur let out a sigh. Tommy watched as the two of them brushed past the baker. The annoying ache returned behind Tommy's chest as he watched the door click shut.

He should be happy that they had left. He could finally breathe without the tension swimming in the air. Tommy's fingers tugged at a loose string on his shirt. He definitely didn't notice how the room felt so empty without them. He didn't miss them at all. What the hell would he miss them? He was supposed to hate them.

"Would you like a donut?" Niki asked softly as she held out the paper bag.

"Oh, I don't know if my stomach can handle it..." Tommy trailed off. He was still feeling a bit blindsided by the whole interaction, but then again the past 48 hours had been just a series of blindsides all in a row.

"The Tommy I know would never pass up on a chocolate glazed donut," Niki smiled as she pulled out the round pastry. His mouth immediately began to water and his stomach grumbled loudly.

"I guess one wouldn't hurt," Tommy yielded. He took a bite and—damn— she had done it again. As he tried to savor each bite of the pillowy and perfectly sweet dessert, Niki offered one to Ranboo and he happily took one as well.

"And I will save this last one for Tubbo when he wakes up," Niki said as she rolled up the top of the paper bag and placed it on the counter. Not *if* he woke up... but *when* he woke up...

Tommy gulped down the last of the donut. Even though now his stomach was satisfied with the taste of sugar, he still felt uneasy. This random device was the only plan that had to break Tubbo away from a mind-controlling Egg. What would happen if it didn't work? What if Tubbo was too far gone to save?

He furrowed his eyebrows together. "Do you think it will work? Like will it actually get rid of the Egg from him?"

Niki leaned on the bed with a solemn smile. "I wish I could say that the neutralizer will work with absolute certainty, but in reality, I don't know if it will work. Based on what Wilbur told

me about Tubbo's condition there's a good chance it could, but I can't guarantee anything."

Tommy's eyes fell on the quilt again. His eyes went back to tracing the seams that snaked around. The one thing in Tommy's life that had always been a guarantee was Tubbo. He was there when they moved into foster homes. He was there when they entered Visions. He was there when Tommy started to be Vigilante. But even that had been taken away. The fabric of his pants bunched up as he balled his hands into fists. He was tired of uncertainty. He was tired of second-guessing everything around him.

"I don't mean to doubt you or Mr. Soot in any way," Ranboo chimed in, "but does the neutralizer even work? Isn't it just a prototype?"

"Don't worry, it works perfectly fine. Honestly, I have no idea how the people at Pandora were even able to make something like this, but it definitely works," Niki turned and grabbed the briefcase. She set it on her lap and snapped it open. Inside, there were two bulky metal cuffs. Tommy did not doubt that these terrible sci-fi bracelets were made by Pandora Laboratory technicians. They were the same people who made Dream's ugly green hero suit.

Niki continued, "You just snap them on and they start working automatically. It's like you never had powers to begin with."

Tommy shared a glance with Ranboo. If Dream could temporarily take people's powers away with his powers, Tommy didn't want to imagine what Dream could do if he had an abundance of ugly bracelets that could take away anyone's powers for as long as he wanted. It was only a matter of time before Pandora Labs replicated the stolen prototype.

"There are pros and cons to them, but they do the job they were designed for," Niki finished. "Something like this would probably never be available to the public. I guess that was Wilbur's reasoning for wanting to steal them."

"It seems like he can make up an excuse to do anything he wants. Big surprise," Tommy replied, bitterness soaking his tone.

A few beats passed and Tommy clenched his jaw. He kept his eyes on the quilt, but Niki's silence was telling. His comment about Wilbur had made her upset. Once again Tommy had fucked up. Niki had been nothing but kind to him, and here he was dumping his feelings about Wilbur on her. Why couldn't he just keep it together for once? Why did he always fuck up? Why was he like this—

A soft chuckle broke Tommy away from his thoughts. Niki replied with a smile, "You're spot on. Wilbur does tend to have an excuse for everything. But I can assure you, just because he has an excuse doesn't mean that he doesn't fuck up."

Confusion washed over his face as she continued, "And don't think I'm excusing Techno and Phil's part in all of this. They both go along with all of Wilbur's plans, the good and the bad. The three of them have made a lot of questionable choices, both in the present and the past. And no matter what, Wilbur always had an explanation for every single one of them."

Tommy laced his fingers together, ignoring the way his gut was twisting, “So how do you know if they’re lying to you? How do you know they’re not just using you?”

Niki laughed, “I don’t.”

“What?!” Tommy exclaimed, frowning in disbelief. “So you’re fine with them lying to you? Exploiting your business and putting you in danger?”

The baker just shook her head. “You don’t think I know that Wilbur Soot is a chronic liar? The man will lie to anyone about the most random shit. He has never told me his real birthday in all the years I’ve known him. He changes it every time I ask! And Techno and Phil? Two of the worst fucking liars I’ve ever seen, but that doesn’t stop them. All three of them go around acting like they’re this big threatening crime group but at the same time donate the majority of their earnings to donating books to underfunded schools.”

As Niki’s words slowly sank in, all Tommy could say was, “Oh…”

“They can go on about ‘not wanting to have any debts’ as long as they want, but it’s all full of shit,” Niki continued, “Those Robin Hood wannabes heard rumors of a potential power neutralizer and stole it just because they knew my powers were making it hard for me to live. They did it because they wanted to help me.”

Niki paused for a moment before letting out another soft laugh. “Damn, I just realized that story sounds extremely similar to another person who broke the law to help me.”

Tommy felt his face heat up. Oh shit. She was talking about him. She was comparing him to The Syndicate. He broke eye contact and stared at the quilt again as a faint memory popped into his mind.

Tommy spun around, anger heating up his face. “You know nothing about me!”

“I know you would burn the world down for the ones you cared about,” Shockwave stated.

“Oh yeah? And how the fuck do you know that?” Tommy sneered.

The criminal sighed, “Because I would do the same thing.”

However, the comparison didn’t spark anger as it had done before. A few weeks ago he would have hated the idea of being compared to a bunch of villains. He was still pissed that they all lied to him, but on the other hand, he didn’t want them to leave forever. His feelings felt murky. They felt grey. Everything was so grey.

His eyes followed the stitches of the quilt pattern, his mind finding solace in the guidance. Tommy’s voice was quiet as he replied, “I don’t know what to do… How am I supposed to fix everything?”

“Well, why don’t we just take it one step at a time? There’s no need to try to do everything all at once,” Niki then handed him a power neutralizer cuff. “You want to help Tubbo get better, right? So let’s start with that.”

He carefully turned the cuff in his hands as Niki turned towards Ranboo. She handed him the remaining neutralizer and continued, "I can tell you've been sitting there worried this whole time too."

Tommy shared a look with Ranboo before his roommate warily took the cuff, trying not to drop it. Nothing was confusing about this. They were going to save Tubbo. That's what the plan had always been from the start.

Maybe some people would rebuild Tommy's rotting ship. He just had to allow them to come on board, one at a time.

Ranboo then looked at Niki with concern. "Didn't you say that these helped you live? We can't just take them away from you and use them on Tubbo if you need them."

Tommy paused. Ranboo was right, they couldn't take away something that was helping her live. He tried to push the cuff back to Niki as he said, "Shit- if you need these to live then we can't--"

"No! No! It's not that serious! I won't die if I don't have the neutralizer. I promise! My powers give me the ability to breathe underwater, but..." then Niki smiled sheepishly before going on, "but I can only sleep if I'm underwater as well."

"Wait..." Tommy's eyes went wide, "Does that mean you're a mermaid?"

Niki punched him in the shoulder and Tommy let out a manly yelp. "I don't have a tail. I just can't sleep unless I'm completely submerged. It wasn't too bad when I lived on the coast with my family, but when I moved to L'Manburg, I realized city apartment bathtubs aren't the greatest places to rest... My point is that I've gone without sleeping for a while before. Lending these cuffs to Tubbo is no problem. I swear."

Tommy nodded in understanding. "Once we finish helping Tubbo, we will give them back to you right away."

"Don't worry, I'm in no rush," Niki replied.

Tommy then faced his unconscious roommate and carefully lifted one of his arms out from underneath the quilt as Ranboo mirrored his actions. The two of them carefully placed the neutralizer cuffs around Tubbo's wrists. Tommy and Ranboo let go as the cuffs clicked into place. The cuffs let out a sharp beep as a faint ring of light lit up around each cuff.

A few seconds passed as the anxiety rose in Tommy's chest.

They all watched with vigilant eyes,

waiting for something to happen;

for anything to happen.

But nothing did.

Tubbo continued to sleep peacefully.

Well, that was anticlimactic, Tommy thought.

He raised an eyebrow at Niki. “Are we supposed to do something else?”

She shrugged. “I have no idea how this is supposed to work. It was Wilbur’s idea.”

“Maybe we should have waited for him to come back before putting on the neutralizers...”
Ranboo put out.

“I guess we just have to wait,” suggested Niki.

But Tommy was tired of waiting. He was tired of feeling useless and sad. He was tired of sitting around allowing time to drag on with the speed of sugary topping found on waffles. Honestly, maybe a damn waffle is what he needed! But he would never know if he just kept sitting around and waiting!

Tommy threw his hands up and exclaimed, “Fuck it! Then let’s go get that dumbass!”

“Are you sure—” Ranboo started to counter, but it was too late. Tommy had already pushed himself off his chair and onto his feet. Niki instantly help her hand out as Tommy took a few steps forward, shaking out the feeling of invisible pins pricking his legs.

“I’m good, I’m good!” Tommy confirmed as he waved off Ranboo and Niki’s concerns. A few dark spots speckled his vision for a moment, but other than that Tommy was up with no problems. Niki’s donuts really did work magic.

“Niki and I can go grab Mr. Soot. It’s okay if you want to stay with Tubbo,” Ranboo offered as Tommy reached the door.

Tommy looked back at his best friend. Other than the cuffs they had put on him, Tubbo looked exactly like he did a few hours ago. Tommy hadn’t even realized how much his body was yearning to move just even a little bit after all the ‘resting’ he had done. He turned back and said, “It’s not like he’s going anywhere. He hasn’t moved since I got here. Plus it’ll be good for me to move around a bit. I’m kind of done with this whole ‘resting’ shit.”

Ranboo sighed as a smile tugged at the ends of his mouth. “I trust that you know yourself, but please do let me know if you’re about to pass out or throw up again. I don’t want to see you slam face-first into the ground.”

Tommy gave a thumbs up and answered, “You got it, Ran-boob.”

“I can stay back with Tubbo if you’d like?” Niki offered, but Tommy shook his head.

“If you don’t mind,” Tommy said, “I don’t want to explain the situation to Wilbur alone... because of the... you know...”

“I understand,” Niki confirmed as she took the lead. “Not to mention, Wilbur never really explained his idea beyond putting the cuffs on Tubbo.”

“Fucking typical,” Tommy scoffed as the door clicked behind him.

“I’m assuming that they’ll just be in the meeting room where I met up with Phil. Quackity doesn’t like it when people wander around,” Niki noted as they went down the opposite direction that Ranboo and Tommy had come in from initially.

They made their way down the empty hallway passing multiple open and closed doors. Most of them were storage areas, but a few were offices and meeting rooms. Tommy didn’t expect the basement of the casino to look so plain, but then again he didn’t spend much time thinking about the basements of casinos.

“Wait, how do you know Quackity?” Tommy asked as they passed a staircase. Loud clanging and various voices carried down them along with dozens of smells. Tommy felt his stomach grumble again.

“The Syndicate isn’t my only business partner,” Niki scoffed. “Plus Quackity single-handedly drives up sales of the pumpkin muffins.”

“Damn, a pumpkin muffin sounds so good. Honestly, I would even take a pumpkin spice latte right now,” Tommy muttered wistfully.

“Do you even like pumpkin spice lattes?” Ranboo questioned. “Not to mention, caffeine dehydrates you and you were told to specifically drink more water.”

“Pff,” Tommy waved off his roommate’s concerns. “That can’t be true! Caffeine is great for you! It helps me function as a normal human!”

“Yeah, so hate to break it to you, but I think you might have a caffeine addiction,” Ranboo pointed out.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You’re starting to sound like Tubbo.”

“That’s because he would probably agree with me.”

“Actually Tubbo greatly supported my caffeine intake!” This was a lie. “He even bought me a pumpkin spice latte!” Now, this was a truth. However, Tommy failed to mention that also Tubbo said he was never going to buy him coffee again afterward.

“This might be a bad time to bring it up, but the pumpkin spice latte is out of the season,” Niki jumped in.

“But you would bring it back for me, right, Niki?” Tommy asked with a weird-sounding baby voice.

Niki ignored him as they turned a corner and said, “The room should be right up here.”

“You wouldn’t bring back pumpkin spice lattes for a dying person?” Tommy asked in disbelief.

“You’re not dying,” Ranboo countered.

“But I almost did die! That’s gotta count for something!”

Niki crossed her arms. “Are you seriously using the almost-dying card to get a latte you don’t even like?”

“...maybe.”

Niki shook her head as Ranboo rolled his eyes and muttered, “For Prime’s sake...”

“What? Maybe I’ll like it after almost dying!” Tommy offered.

However, the very important discussion about the fall-flavored drink was stopped by the door they approached opening up. Wilbur came through and furrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

“Is everything okay?” he asked as his eyes panned over the three of them. Tommy made eye contact with him for a second but Wilbur quickly broke it and focused his attention on Niki. “You could’ve messaged me and we would have been right over. Tommy should be taking it slow.”

Tommy frowned. He was tired of taking it slow. He was tired of tiptoeing around and awkward silences. He was tired of turning away the people in his life that carried the planks to rebuild his ship.

“And why should I take advice from you? You’re literally a balding boomer,” Tommy snapped back. Even though he almost died, he was still a master of roasts.

For a moment surprise passed over Wilbur’s face, but it was quickly replaced by a look of annoyance. Wilbur replied, “At least, I’m not the one that looks like he has the balance of a stack of sticks. You’re lucky we’re in a basement because a light breeze would make you fall right over”

“Oh fuck off! I can stand perfectly–” Tommy wobbled forward and slightly bumped into Ranboo before gaining his footing again. “Perfectly fine!”

“Mhm, sure. I totally believe you. Just like how I believe you know how to read,” Wilbur’s voice dripped with sarcasm as a smirk grew on his dumb face.

“Wait, can you not read?” Ranboo interjected.

“I can fucking read!” Tommy exclaimed.

Wilbur shook his head. “Why are you guys here anyways?”

“I wanted to experience the exquisite architecture of the Las Nevadas Casino basement, obviously,” Tommy replied, matching his ex-teacher’s sarcasm.

“We put the neutralizer on Tubbo,” Niki followed up. “But he hasn’t woken up yet. We wanted to know what you think we should do next.”

Wilbur crossed his arms. “I talked to Charlie a little bit ago and he said it was about to be time for another dose of Tubbo’s anesthetic. I told him to hold off since we needed Tubbo to wake up to see if the neutralizer even worked.”

“Are you seriously saying we just have to wait?” Tommy protested.

“I’m sorry, Tommy, but it’s all we can do right now.”

An ugly thought passed through Tommy’s mind. His eyes fell to the tiled ground as he pressed on, “And what if it doesn’t work? What if he wakes up and that stupid egg is still controlling him?”

A beat passed before Wilbur let out a sigh. “Don’t jump to any conclusions just yet, okay? Let’s just see how this pans out. I know you struggle with being patient—”

“Fuck you!”

Wilbur held his hands up in defense, “Sorry, sorry! A force of habit!”

“Insulting me is a habit for you? Really?” Tommy probed, tilting his head to the side.

“Listen, it just happens. It’s not my fault you’re so...” Wilbur vaguely waved his hand at Tommy, “you.”

“You just gestured to all of me!”

Ranboo stifled a laugh beside him and Tommy shot him a cold glare.

“What I’m trying to say is,” Wilbur continued, still wearing a stupid smirk—maybe Tommy should forget about the ship and just smack him with a plank instead— “just slow down. You’re still recovering remember?”

“And you’re recovering from being a mansplainer. Oh wait, it’s incurable.”

“For fuck’s sake, Tommy, just sit down and rest! Head back to your room and I’ll bring you...” Wilbur trailed off.

Suddenly, his smile fell as he started to focus on the floor.

“Wilbur?” Niki asked cautiously. “Is something wrong?”

“We need to get back to Tubbo’s room,” he answered, his voice quick and serious. “Niki, go find Charlie! Ranboo, you need to teleport us there right now!”

“What? Why?” Ranboo asked with worry in his eyes.

“What the hell is going on?” Tommy snapped, anxiety burning in his throat.

“Something triggered the alarm on Tubbo’s heart rate monitor. I can hear it going off. We need to go now.”

Niki nodded and ran back to the hallway they had just come from. However, Ranboo and Tommy continued to look at Wilbur with wide eyes. A horrible feeling washed over Tommy as his whole body tensed up.

“Are you okay to teleport?” Wilbur placed his hand on Ranboo’s shoulder.

His voice wavered as he answered, “Y-yeah!”

Ranboo then grabbed onto Tommy and Wilbur’s shoulders and the three of them were instantly enveloped by a flurry of purple particles. The next moment Tommy was standing at a door with shrill beeping filling the air.

shitshitshit

His legs were weak from the teleportation, but Tommy didn’t care. His body was moving faster than his thoughts. He needed Tubbo to be okay. He had to be okay. Tommy launched himself towards the door and swung it open.

He tumbled into the room, his heart pounding against his ribs. The blood roaring in his ears was almost as loud as the alarms. He rapidly reoriented himself and locked his eyes on the bed. Tommy froze.

The bed was empty. The heart rate monitor finger clip sat in the middle of the upturned quilt. Where was—

“Hey Tommy!” the voice called out and Tommy’s breath stopped in his throat.

Standing next to the counter and holding a chocolate glazed donut with a bite taken out was none other than—

“Tubbo,” Tommy whispered. He barely heard himself over the machines.

Tubbo was fine.

And wide awake.

Tommy was speechless as he watched his best friend finish his bite of the donut. Tubbo then glanced at the pastry and then back at Tommy. His eyebrows rose as if he realized something and then asked, “Oh shit, was this yours?”

Chapter End Notes

Hi y'all! Thank you for all the support on the previous chapter! I know I have said this before but it makes me so happy you're enjoying the story!

Please do remember that updates may not be super frequent, but I promise I'm writing! I'm just a bit slow lol! Thanks so much for sticking with me! We're about to head into

the end of arc 1... lolol see ya in the next one!

Here are all the links to my various social medias!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #20: Amnesia? Play 20 Questions

Chapter Summary

Tommy asks questions. Tubbo answers a lot of questions. Ranboo trips over a chair.

Chapter Notes

tw // dissociative thoughts (very minor)

(please forgive the spelling/grammar errors... i forgot how to write for a month)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oh shit, was this yours?”

Tommy’s thoughts were spiraling so fast that he couldn’t latch onto one to say aloud. He just stood in front of his best friend, staring wordlessly.

Tubbo furrowed his eyebrows as he continued, “Tommy?”

And then, out of the barrage of thoughts, one broke through.

“Blue,” Tommy whispered, “your eyes are blue.”

Relief drenched Tommy. Tubbo’s eyes were blue. Blue. Not red. Blue.

Confusion washed over Tubbo’s face. “What?”

“Your eyes are blue!” A smile spread across Tommy’s face. He began to reach out as he exclaimed, “You’re o—”

Suddenly, an arm pushed him back and Wilbur cut between Tubbo and him.

Tommy twisted with a scowl, “What the hell?!”

However, Wilbur continued to look forward as he said, “Tubbo! It’s so nice to see you awake! How are you feeling?”

“Mr. Soot? What are you doing here?” Tubbo asked, raising his eyebrow. “Actually, I’m not completely sure where ‘here’ is...”

Tommy replied, excitedly, “You’re not gonna believe this! We’re un—”

However, before he could finish, Wilbur swiftly cut off Tommy. “You know what? Why don’t you go sit down, Tubbo, and we’ll explain everything in just a minute. I quickly need to talk to Tommy and Ranboo outside.”

What a dick, Tommy thought as his face twisted into a frown.

“Fuck off!” he snapped. “I’m not leaving—”

Wilbur turned to him with a serious look. “Outside. Now.”

Tommy gritted his teeth. There was no fucking way this asswipe was speaking to him like this after everything they had been through. “Why the *hell* would I listen—”

“Tommy, please. It’s just for a minute,” Ranboo interrupted, his eyes pleading with Tommy to stand down.

He glanced back at Tubbo who still held a confused look. Tommy had no desire to talk to anyone except for him, but he also knew that Tubbo would hate the fact he was causing conflict again.

“One minute,” Tommy muttered. He pushed past Wilbur and made his way outside of the room.

Wilbur slowly clicked the door shut as Tommy spat, “What the fuck do you want?!”

“Lower your voice,” Wilbur replied in a low voice. “He could hear you.”

“He? Wait, are you talking about Tubbo? Why the fuck would he care...” Tommy trailed off. He glanced between Wilbur and Ranboo’s somber looks. “Are fucking serious?! Do you really think he still possessed by that fucking—”

“I don’t know! I don’t know anything!” Wilbur interrupted.

“Well, I know that his eyes are blue and not red! Meaning you can stop being so fucking paranoid and let me get back to my friend!”

Tommy moved towards the door but Wilbur stepped in front of him.

“Get the fuck out of my way,” Tommy said through a clenched jaw. He was supposed to be playing nice now, but his patience was becoming increasingly thin.

Wilbur held his hands up in defense. “What about before Tubbo kidnapped you? Were his eyes red then?”

Tommy paused. It had felt like a lifetime ago since Tubbo had told him about the job interview. He furrowed his eyebrows. He couldn’t remember what color Tubbo’s eyes were that afternoon. The only memory that kept flashing in his mind was the way Tubbo’s red eyes looked at him with disgust.

“What does that have to do with any of this?” Tommy replied, frowning. “Your plan worked! Shouldn’t we be trying to help him understand what’s going on? Maybe he can tell us the Eggs plan!”

Wilbur pinched the bridge of his nose. “We don’t know if it worked yet. He could still be communicating with the Egg and pretending to act ignorant. We have to be careful about what we say around him.”

“I should’ve known you would do this,” Tommy scoffed as he shook his head. “Withholding the truth is your specialty.”

A look as if Tommy had slapped him washed over Wilbur’s face. Guilt immediately hummed behind Tommy’s chest. Shit.

And I guess burning bridges is my specialty, Tommy thought. He could feel the cracks slowly expanding in the hull of his ship again.

“Mr. S–um, sorry– Wilbur’s right,” Ranboo softly said, finally entering the conversation.

Tommy twisted around. “You are fucking joking.”

“Listen, I understand where you’re coming from, Tommy,” Ranboo knotted his fingers together. “I want to believe that Tubbo is completely fine too, but we just don’t know yet. You know as well as me that the Egg can make Tubbo act however it wants.”

Tommy’s eyes burned as he croaked out, “The Egg is making you say this... you don’t mean it...”

Tubbo leaned in so close that Tommy could feel his breath on his cheeks. Tommy’s blood ran cold as he looked into Tubbo’s eyes. The irises flickered to a familiar blue. “I mean every single word. All you’ve ever done is make my life worse.”

Tommy shook the memory away from his mind as he balled his hands into fists. *Fuck.* They were right.

However, Tommy would rather eat his own sock than admit that out loud. So instead he said, “So what the fuck are we supposed to do? I can’t just act like nothing happened.”

“No one is asking you to do that,” Wilbur answered. “Just be careful about what you reveal to him.”

“So maybe don’t tell him where we are, just in case?” Ranboo continued, “You know, so mind-controlled superheroes don’t come to arrest us.”

“Fine!” Tommy conceded as he crossed his arms. However, sarcasm quickly flooded his voice, “What else? Should I not tell him the time? What about the date? Oh, I’m guessing we shouldn’t tell him our names either, that’ll get him!”

“You know what we’re asking, Tommy,” Wilbur answered flatly. It reminded Tommy of when Wilbur used to ask him to stay after class. His stomach turned.

“Are we done here? Your one minute has been up for a while,” he felt his nails dig into his palms. How the fuck was he supposed to forgive this piece of shit when he continued to act like an all-knowing prick?

“It’s for his safety, Tommy,” Wilbur softly stated as he moved away from the door. “And yours.”

Tommy rolled his eyes in reply. He then placed his hand on the doorknob, but he paused. Before he could stop himself, he spoke in a low voice, “I’m not your student anymore so stop acting like my fucking teacher.”

Before Wilbur could respond, Tommy swung open the door. Tubbo was back in bed and looked up from sipping a bowl of soup.

“Oh, you found my soup!” Tommy forced a smile back on his face to replace his scowl. “How is it?”

Tubbo’s eyes went wide. “Oh shit! I just found it on the side table and I thought—”

“Don’t worry,” Tommy interrupted, shaking his head. “I wasn’t hungry anyway.”

He kept his focus on Tubbo as he sat down next to the bed, but from the corner of his eye, he saw Ranboo and Wilbur shuffle into the room.

“Oh okay!” Tubbo replied before gulping down another spoonful of soup. “I don’t know why, but when I woke up I felt like I hadn’t eaten in days.”

“Well, that makes sense since—” he was cut off by Wilbur clearing his throat. Tommy gritted his teeth, keeping himself from cursing out the man. He continued, “Um— it doesn’t matter since you’re okay now.”

Tubbo wiped his mouth with the back of his hand as he placed the empty bowl on the nightstand. He then furrowed his eyebrows as he asked, “I guess... but I don’t really remember what happened.”

Tommy opened his mouth to respond, but Wilbur spoke first. “Why don’t you tell us what you remember and we can go from there?”

“Well,” Tubbo lowered his head in thought, “earlier today I was hanging out with Tommy. We went to Niki’s, but then Shadow called me and told me to come to the lab.”

Today? We went to Niki’s days ago, Tommy thought. Does he not... oh shit.

“I remember going to the lab, but after that, it gets a bit fuzzy. I think Shadow was there and maybe Cat?” Tubbo then glanced between Tommy and Ranboo. “Wait, were you guys there too? I feel like we spoke, but why would you be at—shit—” He gripped his hair, “I can’t remember.”

“Hey, don’t push yourself,” Ranboo said, resting his hand on Tubbo’s shoulder.

“Just take it slow,” Tommy added. “We’ll help you catch up,” he turned towards Wilbur with a cold look, “right?”

“Of course, we will,” Wilbur quickly slipped into his teacher voice. Tommy clenched his jaw in annoyance. “It seems like you have some amnesia.”

“Okay... Can’t you just tell me what happened? And where are we? And what are these fucking things?” Tubbo began to fiddle with the cuffs on his wrists.

Tommy and Ranboo yelped at the same time, “Don’t!”

Tubbo froze as confusion washed over his face. “Okay...”

“Those are very important so please don’t mess with them,” Ranboo explained.

“What do they do?” Tubbo raised an eyebrow. “Is there something wrong with me?”

Tommy shot a glance at Ranboo. His face mirrored Tommy’s terrible poker face. “No– well– they kind of– ugh...” Tommy paused as he rubbed his temples. “It’s hard to explain.”

Concern tugged at Tubbo’s eyebrows as his eyes flickered between the three people in the room, “What are you guys not telling me? What happened?”

Tommy felt like someone had punched him in the gut as Tubbo made eye contact with him. This was bullshit. He had no desire to lie to his best friend and tiptoeing around the topic was clearly no longer working. Tommy was tired of the deception. He just wanted to go home with his friend.

So ignoring Wilbur and Ranboo’s concerns, Tommy began to speak, “Tubbo, honestly–”

“We don’t know what happened.” Wilbur interrupted.

Tommy twisted around with a scowl on his face. If Wilbur noticed, he didn’t acknowledge it and continued, “We found you unconscious and brought you to this hospital.”

Is this asshole seriously lying to Tubbo? Does he really not trust him that much? Tommy thought, biting his tongue. Tommy hated the fact that this still surprised him.

“We’ve been waiting for you to wake up to tell us what happened,” Ranboo added as he nodded along to Wilbur’s statement.

Tommy blinked. Ranboo was going along with this fucking charade? Seriously? He ignored the pain of his fingernails digging into his palms.

“Well, that fucking sucks,” Tubbo said quietly. He then looked up at Wilbur with an embarrassed look, “Shit– Sorry for all the swearing, Mr. Soot.”

“Seems justified, regarding your situation,” Wilbur replied with a soft smile. What a fucking prick.

“What about Shadow? Maybe he knows what happened,” Tubbo offered.

“Yeah, Shadow’s not going to be much help,” Tommy muttered. It seemed like the adrenaline of Tubbo waking up was beginning to wear off and his headache was coming back.

“Is he okay? Did he get hurt too?” Tubbo wondered.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Wilbur flash a frown in his direction before Wilbur answered, “Shadow’s not here, so we’re not completely sure. But why don’t we focus on restoring your memory? That might shed some light on what happened to you and Shadow.”

“Oh okay,” Tubbo understood. He began twisting the blanket between his fingers. “How are we supposed to do that though? I really don’t remember anything after getting to the lab.”

Tommy shot a doubtful look at Wilbur. What game was he playing? How was lying to Tubbo supposed to help them figure out if he was still possessed by the Egg?

However, their conversation was interrupted by a soft knock which was quickly followed by Charlie popping his head through the door.

“Hello! I see that Tubbo the friend is awake!” Charlie happily said as he walked in.

“Um, hi,” Tubbo said hesitantly.

“This is Charlie, the doctor that had been taking care of you,” Ranboo explained.

“Oh! Thank you for all your help,” Tubbo went on.

Charlie began to check the machines and reattach the devices Tubbo had taken off when he had initially woken up. Then he replied, “It’s no problem, Tubbo the friend! Just Tommy and Ranboo of Visions Academy have been very diligent while waiting for you to wake up as well.”

“Oh really? They’re been just waiting here?” Tubbo smirked as gave each of his roommates a sideways glance. “Don’t *Just Tommy and Ranboo of Visions Academy* have studying to catch up on though?”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “How you can wake up from a coma and start worrying about school?”

Tubbo shrugged. “I’m not. But if I had your grades that would be a different story.”

“You can grade deez n—”

“If you finish that sentence I’m going back into my coma.”

After Charlie finished his work, he gave a small wave before slipping out of the door. Immediately, Tommy felt the air shift again as Wilbur stepped out of the corner he had standing quietly in. He was not very excited to hear what ideas the criminal had been cooking while Charlie had been here.

He clenched his jaw as Wilbur started to speak, "I was thinking that maybe I can ask you some simple questions to help restore your memories. How does that sound?"

Tubbo nodded as Tommy raised his eyebrow at Ranboo. He replied with a silent shrug. It seemed like he was as lost as Tommy. It wasn't like Tommy could argue with helping Tubbo restore his memories, but it didn't stop Tommy's stomach from feeling like a pretzel.

"We'll start with an easy one: What's your name?"

"Oh no, now that might be too much," Tubbo said sarcastically. The more earnestly he went on, "My name is Tubbo Underscore."

"Good, good," Wilbur confirmed. "And how old are you, Tubbo?"

"I am 16."

"When is your birthday?"

"July 7th."

"Where do you go to school?"

"Visions Academy in L'Manburg."

"Where do you live?"

"On the campus of the academy."

"Who do you live with?"

Tubbo glanced between his roommates with a slight smile, "These two weirdos. I think their names are Tommy and Ranboo."

"Hey! The weirdo is just Ranboo!" Tommy interjected. "I am your cool and super manly roommate!"

"Oh, I definitely don't remember that," Tubbo replied with a smirk.

"How am I the weirdo out of the three of us?" Ranboo questioned.

Wilbur cleared his throat, catching the attention of the roommates. His voice was flat as he went on, "Can we please continue? We need to help Tubbo," Wilbur locked eyes with Tommy, "We don't want to frustrate him."

Tommy clamped his mouth shut and lowered his head. He ignored the way his face began to heat up. He knew Wilbur was still suspicious of Tubbo, but wasn't helping to get Tubbo's guard down a good thing?

His gut jumped into his throat. Shit. Getting Tubbo's guard down? Seriously? What the hell was he doing? He was supposed to be on Tubbo's side and prove to Wilbur that he was cured, not getting twisted into Wilbur's bizarre variation of the worst game of 20 questions. His headache continued to pound against his skull.

"We were just joking, Mr. Soot," Tubbo explained in an apologetic tone. "I promise I'm not getting annoyed by them! I actually really appreciate them being here. I guess I'm just a bit nervous."

"I get it, but we want this to go as smoothly as possible. We're all wondering what happened," Wilbur replied. Damn, maybe this asswipe could get a job as an actor if his criminal career fell out.

Ranboo nodded in agreement and Tommy forced a smile as Tubbo glanced over. Tubbo then softly sighed before continuing, "I know. I know."

"Alright. We'll just keep on going with the easy questions. So where do you work?"

"At Pandora Laboratories."

"And when did you start working there?"

"Last Spring."

"Do you remember any of the people you worked with?"

"Most of the time I was shadowing various scientists, but I mainly worked with Sam."

"What about heroes?"

Tubbo shrugged. "I would usually see heroes during large staff meetings or if a hero had specific questions about a sample or device they used. I guess if you're asking me about the heroes I've met then I've met a few."

"Can you list them for us?"

"Uh, Shadow, Cat, Captain, Blaze, 404, and Dream. But more recently it had just been Shadow and Cat."

"Wait, you met with 404? When?" Tommy wondered.

"He mainly came with Dream, you know before he left or retired or whatever. You probably went along with them when you were Dream's assistant."

"What are you talking about? 404 left before I became his assistant," Tommy furrowed his eyebrows.

“No, you started your job the same time I did and 404 definitely came to the labs with Dream when I first started meaning you must’ve at least talked to him.”

Tommy’s headache had now encompassed his entire brain. “I never –”

“Tommy,” Wilbur interrupted. “I bet Tubbo can explain more about 404 later, but we should really get back to helping recover his memory of what happened to him. Right?”

Tommy shook away the unsettling feeling and replied, “Yeah, sure.”

Wilbur brought his attention back to Tubbo and continued his barrage of questions, “So what was the last place you remember visiting?”

“Besides when I got to the lab, I went to Niki’s.”

“Did you go with anyone?”

“I went with Tommy.”

“What did you have to eat?”

“I think I had a coffee and a muffin.”

“Did you speak to anyone between Niki’s and the lab?”

“Ranboo called me and I think we just talked about homework. Right?” Tubbo glanced over at Ranboo who was nodding.

“What homework was it?”

“Biology, maybe?”

“And who teaches your biology class?”

“Mrs. Diorite.”

“Who do you usually study biology with?”

“Tommy, Ranboo, and Aimsey.”

“And why does the Egg want Tommy?”

“Because it believes Tommy is the key to opening portals.”

Tommy froze.

He slowly turned towards his best friend with wide eyes.

What the hell did he just say?

A few beats of silence passed before Wilbur’s voice rang out, “Get away from him. Now.”

“Did I say something wrong?” Tubbo asked, his eyes frantically searching their faces for an answer. “What was the question again?”

The sound of a chair scratching the floor filled the room as Ranboo tripped over it. His face was pale as he scrambled to gain balance again. However, Tommy struggled to focus on the scene as his heartbeat filled his ears.

“Tommy, back up,” Wilbur ordered, his voice cutting through the pulse.

But his body refused to move. This wasn’t supposed to be happening. Tubbo was supposed to be fine. His eyes were blue. His eyes were fucking blue. The cuffs were supposed to fix him. He was supposed to be okay now.

“What’s happening? What did I do? I don’t even remember what I said!” Tubbo asked, his voice filled with panic now.

“Tommy!” Wilbur shouted as he grabbed Tommy’s shoulder. The sudden movement pulled him from the shock and Tommy immediately slapped Wilbur’s hand away from him.

Suddenly a fire sparked behind his chest. He had tried to concede. He had tried to forgive him. He had tried to push down the anger. He had tried to let people restore his ship. He had tried to push through the awkwardness. He had tried to be better. He had tried and tried and tried.

As much as he wished he could push down his emotions and move on, as much as he wished the numbness to quiet his roaring rage, as much as he wished to reach out and accept the planks for his splintering mind,

his reality betrayed him.

“Fuck off!” Tommy snapped.

“What?” Wilbur recoiled. “You need to get away from him!”

“He just said he doesn’t remember what you asked him!”

“He just mentioned the fucking Egg, Tommy! He clearly is still connected to it!”

“You’re paranoid, Wilbur! His eyes are blue now! The cuffs are working!” Tommy twisted around and focused on Tubbo. His roommate’s blue eyes were wide with fear as Tommy pressed, “You’ve not connected to the Egg anymore, right?”

“E-egg? I don’t– I’m not sure– what’s going—” Tubbo started to stutter, but Tommy’s rage encompassed his body and he quickly whipped back around to Wilbur.

“See! He has no idea what the fuck is going on!” Tommy yelled.

“Stop being ignorant. We need to knock him out again until we defeat the Egg,” Wilbur took a step forward, but Tommy cut him off.

“Don’t fucking touch him.”

From behind them, Tubbo whispered, “Knock me out? Why? I didn’t...”

Wilbur ignored the question as he continued, “This is for your protection.”

“Um, guys...” Ranboo said softly but was quickly ignored.

Tommy let out a cold laugh. “As if anything you ever did for me actually protected me. All you’ve ever done is fucking lie to me.”

Wilbur winced as if he had just punched him. “I didn’t mean to—”

“I don’t give a shit about what you meant to do! You still did it and it still fucking hurt!” Tommy spat and then shoved Wilbur into the wall. “And after all the things you fucking did to me, you really think I’m just going to let you stand here and manipulate Tubbo and then use your fucking powers on him to knock him out again?!”

The criminal didn’t attempt to fight back as he said, “Tommy—”

His voice was as loud as his headache now. “I tried to give you a fucking chance! I tried to understand you, but you enjoy fucking with people’s heads!”

“I’m sorry but we don’t have time—”

“Guys?” Ranboo faintly said again.

“No! There is no ‘we’ anymore! Honestly, I’m not sure if there was ever a ‘we’! What was the point of acting like you cared about any of us? Caring about *me*?”

He felt his eyes sting as his face continued to heat up. He should stop. Everything he had done to keep the peace was being washed away. He should keep calm for Tubbo and Ranboo. His emotions didn’t matter right now.

But the words were uncontrollable. They were bubbling to the top, flooding his mind.

“How the fuck am I supposed to trust you to keep my friend safe? How the fuck am I supposed to trust anyone?! Everyone I cared about has continuously lied to my face for months!”

“I—”

His nails dug into his palms. “You know what the worst part is? That I still fucking care! I still care about the people who betrayed me! I know I shouldn’t, but I do! What does that say about me? Why the hell am I like this?!” The words were tearing up the back of his throat as he continued to scream. “I’m so fucking confused all the time! I just wanted everything to go back to normal! I just want everything to be fixed but every time I try it’s useless! Everything fucking thing I do is useless! Tubbo’s awake and I still can’t fucking help him!”

“Tommy!” Ranboo shouted, cutting through his spiral.

“What?!” accidentally throwing his anger onto Ranboo as he turned around.

“I’m sorry, you’re going through a lot, but Tubbo...” His eyes lowered towards the bed.

“What’s wrong...” he trailed off as his focus landed on his roommate. His blood went cold.

Tubbo was gripping his head and muttering to himself. His back was frantically going up and down while his whole body was shaking.

“Fuck!” Tommy cursed as he jumped forward. Memories of finding Tubbo in the Egg headquarters flashed in his mind. He swallowed the bile that had risen to his neck. “What happened?!”

“I don’t know! He just started freaking out while you guys were fighting!” Ranboo replied.

“I-I didn’t—I promise I won’t— I can’t— I don’t want—to go back— I promise— I— please—d— don’t make me—” Tubbo stuttered between choppy breaths, ignoring everyone else in the room.

“Tubbo! Tubbo! Can you hear me?!” Tommy said with a shaky voice.

“He’s having a panic attack. We need to help him calm down,” Wilbur stressed. “I can—”

“Don’t you fucking touch him!” Tommy screamed. “You are not knocking him out!”

At this, Tubbo’s head shot up, his eyes wide with fear. He pleaded, “Please! Please don’t put me out again! I promise I will listen this time! Just tell me what It wants!”

Wilbur raised his hands and softly said, “I won’t. I promise. But we’re not sure what you mean, who wants you to do something?”

Tubbo’s eyes flickered between the three of them, his breaths were becoming steady, but his hands were still quivering. He anxiously replied, “Is this a test? Because if you just give me more time I promise I’ll hear It... I just need time.”

“Hear it? Are you talking about the Egg?” Ranboo questioned.

“Can you not hear the Egg anymore, Tubbo?” Tommy followed up quietly, a lump had formed in his throat.

Tubbo looked at him with a panicked expression and quickly replied, “I *did* hear It... just not right now... but you can tell me what It’s saying until I can, right? Just please don’t make me go back to being alone with It, please don’t—”

Tommy suddenly felt the tension in his body release and let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding. “Oh, man, we just got out of that fucking awful hellhole! We would never take you back!”

A wash of surprise covered Tubbo’s face as he looked around cautiously. “Wait... are you guys not with the Egg?”

“With the Egg? Fuck no! Next time I see that overgrown weed I’m going to make it into a fucking omelet!” Tommy scoffed.

“So you aren’t being controlled by the Egg?” Tubbo worriedly looked between his roommates. “Didn’t we meet the Egg and...”

“We escaped and then brought you here,” Ranboo explained. “We rescued you from the Egg.”

“Plus if that bitch chicken baby could ever control my epic awesome brain,” Tommy smirked.

Tubbo let out a sigh before replying with a slight smile. “Or maybe there’s nothing in there for it to control.”

“My giant brain is very full—”

“Tubbo,” Wilbur interrupted, catching everyone’s attention. The tension in the air was making the hairs on Tommy’s neck rise. The criminal then slowly asked, “Are *you* being controlled by the Egg?”

Heat burned the back of Tommy’s throat as he opened his mouth to curse out the criminal for even suggesting that, but to his surprise, Tubbo spoke first, “I- I don’t know.”

“But you aren’t spouting shit about how the Egg is fantastic anymore!” Tommy countered as confusion spread across his face.

“I don’t know how to describe it. Even though It’s not talking anymore, I don’t think it’s completely gone. I can still feel It. It’s just quiet,” Tubbo hesitated, twisting the blanket between his fingers tighter. His voice was shaky as he went on, “And I don’t know when it’s coming back... I don’t want it to come back.”

Tommy grabbed his shoulder and Tubbo looked up at him with watery eyes. His stomach dropped. He took a deep breath in before he said, “We won’t let it come back. *I* won’t let it come back. I’m never letting that thing take you away again.”

“We’re here for you, Tubbo,” Ranboo added, “no matter what.”

Tubbo breathed in and out a few times before sitting up. “Sorry...”

“You have nothing to apologize for,” Tommy reassured. “You’re handling it pretty well for someone who was just possessed by an overgrown weed.”

“I’m the one that needs to apologize,” Wilbur stated. His voice sounded genuine, but Tommy had no idea anymore. “I’m sorry that pushed you to that point. I should have been more careful.”

Tubbo shook his head. “It was bound to happen. It’s coming back more quickly now. Some stuff is still fuzzy, but from what I can remember, none of it is good...” he trailed off, breaking eye contact and looking at the bed again.

“Don’t worry,” Ranboo replied, “just take it slow. You don’t need to remember everything at once.”

“Maybe in the meantime, we can tell you what happened while you were out!” Tommy excitedly suggested. He then dropped his smile and turned towards Wilbur and coldly continued, “Unless you think he’s still being controlled.”

Wilbur sighed. “I’m not doubting that Tubbo is feeling better, but considering that he’s not sure if he’s still connected to the Egg or not then we should probably refrain—”

“You’re so full of bullshit!” Tommy yelled as he jumped to his feet. He could feel his anger start warm behind his chest again. “All you ever do—”

“He’s right, Tommy,” Tubbo cut him off.

Tommy whipped around with a look of disbelief. “What?”

“His right,” Tubbo repeated. “My mind might be clear from the Egg’s voice right now, but that doesn’t mean the Egg won’t use me again—”

“No! We won’t let that fucking predeveloped poultry and its bitchass cult near you again!”

“I know, but it’s not up to you. The Egg is... persistent. We don’t know if—or when—it will come back and if that happens... I can’t control what it learns from me. You can’t trust me.”

Tommy’s gut twisted into a knot. “But I do trust you. I don’t care what you tell the Egg.”

Tubbo let out a light laugh. “I’m glad that you trust me, but I care what I tell the Egg, and the last thing I want to do is put you in danger.”

“Who gives a shit about me!”

“I give a shit! I fucking shot you!” His eyes suddenly went wide. He grabbed Tommy’s shoulders, worry creasing his eyebrows as he looked Tommy up and down. “Fuck! I shot you! Are you okay?!”

“I’m fine! I’m fine!” Tommy answered. “You missed!”

Tubbo let out a sigh of relief and dropped his hands back to the bed. “Oh thank Prime. I don’t know what I would have done if I actually had shot you.”

Tommy and Ranboo exchanged a glance. Tommy laughed awkwardly, “Well, you missed me but...”

“But what?” Tubbo asked, frowning.

“I kind of got hit instead,” Ranboo finished sheepishly.

“What?!” Tubbo twisted around to look at Ranboo. “How did— what—Fuck! Are you okay?!”

Ranboo held his hands up in defense. "I'm okay! I got help and I'm healed now! Don't worry!"

"I am so sorry. I didn't mean to— well—I didn't realize that—"

"Hey, hey, hey," Tommy interrupted. "It's not your fault. You were forced to do it."

Tubbo's grip on the bed sheets tightened again as he lowered his head. "You don't understand. The Egg didn't force me to do anything. It might've given me the idea, but the action was all mine," he paused trying to steady his voice, "the words were all mine too."

"That's not true," Tommy shook his head. "You're probably just misremembering."

"No. I'm not. I remember what happened before... fuck," Tubbo gripped his hair.

"Listen, this is what the Egg wants," Ranboo stated. "It wants you to think you wanted to do those things but—"

"No! You're not getting it!" Tubbo burst. "The Egg doesn't make you say or do anything. Yes, it's loud as fuck and it never stops fucking talking but it can't make you do anything. And it doesn't makeup shit. It takes whatever hopes, dreams, or insecurities you have and amplifies them."

Tubbo continued, his red eyes filled with icy rage, "You act so high and mighty. Just like the superheroes you say you fucking hate. You think that you have the right to judge others and their actions, but the truth is you can't because you are not a good person."

Tommy frowned. That couldn't be true. That would mean that all those things Tubbo said were...

"News flash! You're not special! No one cares that you break the law to 'help' people! We live in a society of fucking superheroes! In reality, you are even less than special. Even with superpowers you somehow find a way to fuck up every single part of your life." Tubbo took a step closer. Tommy winced at the icy rage that radiated off of him. "You're a fucking mistake."

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut. Tubbo was his best friend. Yes, they had their fights, but everything was resolved. Everything was supposed to go back to normal once he woke up.

Tommy's eyes burned as he croaked out, "The egg is making you say this... you don't mean it..."

Tubbo leaned in so close that Tommy could feel his breath on his cheeks. Tommy's blood ran cold as he looked into Tubbo's eyes. The irises flickered to a familiar blue.

"I mean every single word. All you've ever done is make my life worse."

But it wasn't going to be normal. It was never going to be normal again.

He had chosen to be a vigilante. He had chosen to work with criminals. He had put his friends in danger. He had almost died. Time and time again, it was him.

He had ruined his life and any chance for it to be normal. And his friends resented him for it.

“Oh,” was all Tommy could muster out. He dug his nails into his thighs to keep his eyes from burning, but his mind continued spinning.

All this time he was fighting for a reality that was never coming back. He had ruined everything. The rot was coming from within him

and it had infected every aspect of his life.

Tubbo got kidnapped. Ranboo got shot. Not to mention he had just screamed in Wilbur’s face, ruining any chances of peace between them.

What was the point of rebuilding a ship that was never meant to float?

What was the fucking point of doing any of this? What was the point of caring for people who secretly hated him? What was the point of fighting to be better? There was no better. He would never be better. He was never good enough, to begin with. He was a mistake. He needed to be fixed. *Everything needed to be fixed.* ~~**Everything was wrong. Everything needed to be destroyed. Everything needed to be gone. He needed to start over. Everything needed to start ov=**~~

Tubbo grabbed his shoulders, snapping Tommy out of his thoughts.

“Everything I said was wrong, Tommy,” Tears welled up in his best friend's eyes. “I am so sorry. What I said was awful.”

“You don’t have to—” Tommy started, but Tubbo squeezed his shoulders, cutting him off.

“No. I was wrong about everything. I was insecure and bitter for no fucking reason even before the Egg. You didn’t deserve my anger. Y-You’re not a mistake,” Tubbo dropped his hands to wipe the tears that had started to run down his face. “Y-You’ve never been a mistake. You’re a g-good person and I don’t care that you do s-stupid shit, because as long as we’re doing stupid shit together, who c-cares? Y-You’re my best friend. And I need you. I will always need you. And I am sor—”

Tommy pulled him into a tight hug. He could feel tears dampen his face and soak into Tubbo’s shoulder as he sunk into the warm embrace. Tubbo was here. He was here and he was safe.

“You’re so fucking clingy,” Tommy mumbled softly.

Tubbo leaned back with a smile. “Aren’t you the one who snuck into an evil mind-controlling cult to rescue me?”

“I did that because I wanted to destroy a giant evil Egg. You just happened to be there,” Tommy answered. This was a lie.

His roommate raised his eyebrow. “And how did that go?”

“The plan is... planning.”

Tubbo lightly laughed. “Well, I can’t wait for you to scramble it and then send it back to its hellhole of dimension.”

“I was thinking more of sending it into space or just setting it on fire,” Tommy paused. “Wait, can the Egg be set on fire?”

“Uh, probably, but why can’t you just send it back?” Tubbo raised an eyebrow.

“Because I can’t?” Tommy awkwardly laughed. “I know you’ve got amnesia and shit, but you seriously don’t remember my powers?”

“I don’t mean to interrupt,” Wilbur spoke up. “Are you telling us that the Egg is from a different dimension? How the fuck did that even happen?”

Tubbo turned to Tommy with a confused look. “You didn’t tell them?”

However, Tommy matched his friend’s confusion. “Tell them what?”

“You know, how you opened a gate and...” he trailed off as Tommy, Wilbur, and Ranboo continued to stare at him blankly. “Shit, you guys don’t know.”

Tommy frowned. “I have no idea—” he started to say, but he cut himself as a memory surfaced.

“The Egg knows nothing about me!” Tommy hissed.

“Of course, the Egg knows you. You’re the one who brought it here,” Shadow stated.

Suddenly everything went silent. Even the pounding had stopped.

“What did you say?” His voice was barely a whisper.

“Why do you think you’re called ‘the key,’ Tommy? You’re the one who opened the gate to allow the Egg to come to our dimension.”

“Fuck,” Tommy whispered as he gripped his head.

“What are you not telling us, Tommy?” Wilbur stressed, concern creasing his eyebrows.

“Give me a fucking second!” Tommy snapped. His pounding head had returned in full force as he attempted to sort through his thoughts. Everything in his skull had begun to feel murky again. As if he was against a barrier of thoughts, unable to get through.

“I can explain it if you want?” Tubbo offered. Tommy nodded wordlessly and he kept his head down as Tubbo continued, “According to the Egg, Tommy is the one that brought it here.”

“What?” Ranboo breathed.

“How is that even possible?” Wilbur pressed. “Tommy has gravity powers. He can’t open portals to other dimensions.”

“Apparently he can. That’s why the Egg calls Tommy ‘the key.’ It believes he can open more portals to other dimensions so it can bring the rest of its species here to—you know—take over the world and shit.”

“Is that true, Tommy? Did you really bring the fucking Egg here?” Wilbur’s tone was sharp.

“I don’t know!” Tommy shot back, then more softly repeated, “I don’t know. I don’t remember being able to open portals but...” He paused as a piercing pain of déjà vu made him nauseous. “But I feel like I had something to do with it. I don’t know how or when, but I recognized the feeling when I was stuck in that chamber with The Egg.”

Wilbur ran his hand through his hair as he cursed under his breath. Then in his regular voice, he said, “I think I need to go get Phil and Techno. They need to hear this.”

“Good idea,” Ranboo agreed before Wilbur left the room, leaving the three roommates alone.

Once again the sound of the heart rate monitor filled the air. Each beep felt like it was being nailed into Tommy’s head. The pain was not helping the rampage of incoherent thoughts that were flooding his mind.

Tubbo was still in danger of being controlled by the Egg. Everyone was still in danger of being controlled by the Egg. *Everyone was in danger because of him.* The only way to save everyone was to get rid of It. He needed to get rid of It.

But he didn’t even know how he brought it here. How the hell was he supposed to get rid of something if he didn’t even know how to kill it? Was it even possible to kill? What if he killed it and everyone infected by It died too? If he hurt the Egg then Tubbo would get hurt and he couldn’t hurt Tubbo. If he hurt Tubbo then he would fail. ~~He already hurt Tubbo.~~ He had no idea what to do. ~~He was going to fail and it would all be pointless. It was all pointless. Everything needed to start over. He could make everything start ov=~~

Someone touched his shoulder, making Tommy jump.

“Are you okay?” Tubbo asked, frowning with worry.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine,” Tommy replied as he blinked rapidly to adjust his vision back to reality. He hadn’t even realized he had zoned out.

“Sorry about bringing up your connection to the Egg. I didn’t know you hadn’t told them.”

“No, no, don’t feel bad,” Tommy rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I had pushed it to the back of my mind until you mentioned it... fuck. Too much has happened. I can barely keep up.”

“I can go get Charlie if you need to lie down,” Ranboo offered, starting to get up.

Tommy shook his head. “Thanks, but I’m fine here. I think resting might be part of the problem. My brain has been having too much time to think.”

“Oh, we can’t have that. You don’t have enough brain cells for it,” Tubbo smirked as Ranboo let out a light laugh.

“I can’t believe you’re making fun of a man who almost died!” Tommy countered.

“You can’t use that excuse anymore,” Tubbo scoffed. “Blade attacked you like a month ago. Ranboo is the only one that can use that excuse right now.”

Tommy and Ranboo exchanged an awkward smile. Then Tommy sheepishly went on, “Oh yeah... we have something else we have to tell you.”

Tubbo’s smile dropped. “Please don’t tell me you almost died.”

Tommy lowered his head in shame, “I almost died.”

Instantly, Tubbo punched him in the arm.

“Ow! What the hell?!” Tommy yelped.

“I promised me you would never do that again!”

“I know! I know! I didn’t mean to do it! I didn’t have a choice.”

Tubbo crossed his arms. “What happened?”

Tommy mumbled the answer, barely opening his mouth to let the words out.

“What happened, Tommy?” Tubbo repeated, growing impatient.

“A building fell on me,” Tommy said more clearly.

“Are you fucking joking? I get possessed one time and you somehow get a building dropped on you?!” Tubbo then turned towards Ranboo, “Why the hell did you not stop him?”

“A lot was happening?” Ranboo shrugged.

Tubbo rubbed his temples. “After all this Egg shit, you two better give me the whole story or I will make your lives with me as your roommate hell.”

“I will have you know that I was saving Wilbur,” Tommy pointed out. “So I think my choice was justified,”

“Why was—oh yeah—I meant to ask you guys, why is Mr. Soot here anyways? How does he know about the Egg?” Tubbo wondered.

Ranboo raised an eyebrow. “Should we wait for Wilbur to come back to tell him?”

“He’s about to bring Phil and Techno anyways. It’ll speed up explanations if we just tell him now,” Tommy replied.

“Tell me what?” Tubbo prodded.

“If you think he’d be okay with it,” Ranboo went on.

“Who gives a shit what he’s okay with? I got impaled by rebar for him,” Tommy stated.

“You got impaled?!” Tubbo stressed in disbelief. “Are you okay?!”

“Yeah, yeah, Charlie healed me,” Tommy answered nonchalantly. “That’s not important right now. You know that infamous crime group The Syndicate?”

“Um... yeah? I’m sorry I’m still on the fact that you got impaled but are fine now. How long was I out for?”

“A day or so,” Ranboo interjected to answer Tubbo’s question.

“Oh... But how— Does Charlie have healing powers or something?” Tubbo followed up.

“Hey! Can we focus?” Tommy huffed. “I’m trying to do a cool reveal!”

Tubbo held his hands up in mock defense. “Sorry, sorry! What’s relevant about The Syndicate?”

“Wilbur... is a part of it.”

“Really?” Tubbo let out a laugh. “What does he do for them? Organize their stolen book collection?”

“He’s Shockwave.”

Tubbo’s smile faded. “The guy that almost burst your eardrums is our English teacher?”

“Ex-English teacher,” Tommy corrected.

“He almost killed you! Multiple times!”

“Yeah...” Tommy let out a sigh. “Also Phil and Techno are Angel and Blade.”

His roommate paused, frowning in thought.

“I know it’s a lot, I’m still struggling to understand it too,” Tommy went on. “But I promise after this whole Egg shit I will never speak to them again.”

Tubbo nodded before saying, “I do have one question though.”

“What’s up?”

“Who the fuck are Phil and Techno?”

Chapter End Notes

backflips idk im slow at writing

ty for all the lovely comments tho it really helps keep me motivated while my brain forgets how words work

I hope you all have a lovely rest of your day/night/whenever you are reading this :)

Here are all the links to my various social medias!

[My Twitch](#)

[My YouTube](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

[My Tumblr](#)

Rule #21: Don't Get the Casino Chicken Noodle Soup

Chapter Summary

Tommy doesn't like the soup.

Chapter Notes

... it's dialogue again... it's just 13k words of dialogue... but then again when is it not lol

tw // death mention but nothing new

please forgive my grammar and spelling <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo dragged his hand down his face. “Okay, okay, okay. So your coworkers and our ex-English teacher are the members of The Syndicate, but you had no idea that they were the whole time you were working with them at the bookstore or as Vigilante. But somehow they knew that you were Vigilante and they were hiding it from you the whole time. Along with that Mr. Soot and your coworker Techno used to be heroes, but then quit for some reason. Did I get that right?”

“Pretty much,” Tommy confirmed as Ranboo nodded.

“Did they reveal this to you before or after you got a building dropped on you?” Tubbo raised an eyebrow.

“Before. They didn’t really have to do anything with the building being dropped on me.”

“Then who dropped a building on you?—ugh— sorry I keep forgetting you’re not supposed to be really telling me this stuff...”

Tommy shook his head. “Honestly, who the fuck cares what the Egg knows? You deserve to know what happened.”

Tubbo lowered his head. “I don’t know. How are we sure that the Egg won’t use all this stuff against you guys later?”

“Well, if we think about it, the Egg probably knows most of this information since it controls some of the top heroes in the city,” Ranboo added. “Plus if we can help you get your memories back then you can help us take down the Egg. Right?”

“I guess so...” Tubbo trailed off.

“What’s It going to do if we tell you, anyway?” Tommy scoffed. “Hm? Shoot us? Again?”

Tubbo lightly pushed Tommy with fake anger. “Hey! You’re not allowed to joke about that yet!”

“Oh really? What are you going to do? Shoot—”

This time Tubbo punched Tommy in the arm with his full strength.

“You are abusing an injured person!” Tommy whined.

Tubbo turned to Ranboo and asked, “Did you see someone hit Tommy?”

Ranboo shook his head. “I didn’t. He seems perfectly fine to me.”

Tommy frowned. “You’re literally gaslighting me. You’re gaslighting a victim.”

“Someone needs to take that word away from you,” Ranboo stated.

“Take away deez—”

Tubbo punched Tommy again.

“Ow! That one actually hurt!”

“Good. You deserve it,” Tubbo replied.

“I need new roommates,” Tommy pouted as he fell back into his chair.

“You love us too much to get rid of us,” Tubbo chuckled.

Tommy stuck his tongue out as an epic comeback.

Tubbo rolled his eyes with a smile. But then after a few moments, his smile faded, “I really am sorry about all this. If I had just resisted longer then maybe—”

“Don’t do that,” Tommy interrupted, sitting up again. “Don’t think about the ‘maybe.’ You’re back now. That’s all that matters.”

“None of this is your fault,” Ranboo added. “You did everything you could.”

Tubbo let out a sigh. His knuckles were turning white as he gripped the blanket again. In a soft voice, he went on, “I just don’t know how you guys trust me after everything I did. I don’t even trust myself anymore.”

Tommy placed his hand on Tubbo’s shoulder. “I’ll repeat it as many times as you need me to. I will always trust you, Tubbo. No matter what.”

Tubbo loosed his grip and weakly smiled. “Thanks, Tommy.”

“Not to mention, what you did is nothing compared to how many times Tommy tried to send me into the atmosphere,” Ranboo mentioned.

“Hey! I can still send you up there!” Tommy countered.

Ranboo held his hands up in defense as Tubbo lightly laughed, “I think the most surprising thing about all of this is that you two are getting along.”

“Who the hell said that we—” However, Tommy was cut off by a soft knocking. The three roommates turned to see Wilbur push open the door.

“Is it alright if we come in? I brought Phil and Techno,” he asked.

The thought of his coworkers being in the same room made Tommy’s stomach flip. His mind and body were still not on the same page on how they wanted to react to them. Deciphering his thoughts about them was like trying to find a train card in the sewers of L’Manburg. Dark, murky, and covered in shit. And somehow Tommy felt like he’d rather be in the sewers than here.

Luckily, he didn’t have to respond as Tubbo answered, “Come on in, Mr. Soot.”

“Just call me Wilbur. No need for formalities,” Wilbur said as he entered the room. He was followed by Phil and Techno. They looked no different than when they had been in here earlier, with the exception that Phil had hidden his wings.

Immediately, Phil stepped forward and reached his hand out towards Tubbo to shake. “It’s nice to meet you, Tubbo. I’m Phil.”

Tubbo shook his hand as he answered, “Nice to meet you too.”

“And that’s Techno,” Phil continued, tilting his head towards the swordsman. Techno wordlessly nodded as a greeting. “We worked with Tommy at the bookstore.”

“Nice, nice...” Tubbo replied with a strained smile. He shot a side-eye at Tommy as if Tommy was supposed to say something too. Unfortunately, his thoughts were still floating in sewer water.

“I explained the situation on our way over here,” Wilbur stated. “But I realized that Tubbo might be confused about how a bunch of bookstore owners can fight the Egg. I know it might be a bit of a shock, but—”

“You guys are The Syndicate, yeah, I know,” Tubbo interrupted. “Tommy and Ranboo already told me.”

“Oh really?” Wilbur shot a look at Tommy.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “What? We were just catching him up! What’s the Egg going to do with the identities of a bunch of book nerds?”

Wilbur opened his mouth to counter, but he was cut off by Phil stifling a laugh.

“Seriously?” Wilbur frowned.

“It’s not like he’s wrong,” Techno replied. “The Egg can’t really do much with our identities. We’re basically nobodies.”

“You two are—ugh, I don’t care,” Wilbur conceded. “We can just continue with what Tubbo was explaining before I left.”

Tubbo and Tommy exchanged a glance before Tommy’s eyes fell to the floor. He felt his whole body tense up with anxiety again. However, this time he focused on his best friend’s voice to keep his thoughts in line.

“There’s not much more to explain,” Tubbo said. “The Egg believed that Tommy was the one that brought It here and it wanted Tommy so it open the gate to Its dimension again.”

“The Egg might believe that, but do we?” Phil asked.

A few seconds of silence passed and Tommy felt multiple pairs of eyes boring into his skull.

He didn’t raise his head as he spoke, “For the past few months, I thought I was having these weird dreams, but I’m starting to think that they weren’t just dreams.”

“Months?” Tubbo asked. “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I thought they were just some weird dreams! I didn’t think they meant anything!” he glanced up. Everyone looked at him like a wounded animal, making him strain his jaw. “It doesn’t matter anymore. I don’t remember any details from them, just vague feelings. Even if I did bring the stupid thing here, I don’t know how the fuck I did it.”

“That’s a good thing then, right?” Ranboo entered the conversation. “The Egg can’t use Tommy to open portals or gates or whatever because he doesn’t know how.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” Wilbur replied, his arms crossed. “From what Tubbo has told us, it seems like once you’re under its control, the Egg has access to all your knowledge. If Tommy has opened a gate before and has suppressed the memory of it that doesn’t stop the Egg from retrieving that memory and forcing him to open a gate.”

“Oh…” Ranboo lowered his head.

Wilbur continued, “For now, it’s best to keep Tommy away from the Egg long as possible.”

Tommy forced himself to stop grinding his teeth. If he clenched just jaw any harder he might crack a molar. He hated this. He was more than capable of taking care of himself. He didn’t need anyone to ‘keep him away’ from shit. Least of all a bunch of criminals who had betrayed his trust. He didn’t care at all about the fact that they wanted to protect him. They probably were just doing it because they didn’t want more mind-controlling Eggs in their dimension. Obviously. They didn’t actually care. And neither did he. He didn’t care one single bit. Nope. Not at all.

“Is there anything else you can tell us about the Egg, mate?” Phil wondered, focusing on Tubbo.

Tubbo shook his head. “My memories are still quite hazy. It seemed like the Egg really only came after me because It thought I could help possess Tommy.”

Silence quickly fell between the occupants of the room. Only the clicks and beeps of the machine filled the air as a few long moments passed.

Tommy could feel his thoughts beginning to become unruly again. He had no idea how they were going to resolve this. They basically had no information about the situation as they sat hidden in a basement. With every passing second the Egg could be possessing more and more people. The longer they waited the more powerful the Egg got. ~~The Egg that he had brought here. This was all his fault. The world was in danger all because of him. This was his fault--~~

“Fuck,” Tommy whispered under his breath. He dug his nails into his palms. He couldn’t spiral. Not right now. He took a silent breath and then asked, “What else do we know about this dumb poultry plant?”

The criminals briefly looked at each other before Wilbur started, “We really only had one encounter with the Egg cult, but there’s not much to it.”

A memory flashed in Tommy’s mind as felt the scars on his hands faintly throb. Oh yeah. The night that Blade— or Techno—attacked him. *The night he almost bled to death.*

“Not much to it?” Tommy snapped back, much more sharply than he intended. He forced himself to not look at the swordsman as he cleared his throat and tried again, “Ehem— you should tell us anyway. Just so everyone is on the same page.”

“You’re right. But I’m being honest when I say that the story is short,” Wilbur broke eye contact as he continued, “We got a call for a job that night in North L’Manburg. Some sort of deal was happening and we were asked to steal some of the cargo. But before Techno and I got there, we got ambushed.”

“Heroes?” Ranboo wondered.

Wilbur shook his head, “No, no. I think they were some members of the local superpower gang. Normally, we would have knocked them out and then been on our way. However, these guys were different.”

“They were a part of the Egg,” Tubbo stated.

The criminal nodded in confirmation. “I wasn’t expecting random gang members to move the way they did. It was like the Egg had enhanced their abilities or something.”

Tommy felt a shiver run down his back as the fight between Techno and the red-eyed man crossed his mind. The way that man had been moving was unnatural. Monstrous.

“Obviously at the time, we didn’t know about the Egg. We were fighting these guys to get away from them, but they just kept coming. But then... um...” Wilbur trailed off as he turned

towards Techno. “Do you want me to—”

“I can say it,” Techno answered.

The phantom pains in his hands stung and Tommy squeezed his fists until his knuckles were white. His mind felt like it was splitting as two vastly different opinions formed in his head.

He shouldn’t even be listening to this. The last thing he wanted to relive that night. He saw firsthand what these criminals were capable of. Why the hell did he trust them not just betray him the moment they got out of here? How much money would they take to turn him over to the Egg?

On the other hand, Techno was the one to save them from the Egg. Without him, Tommy, Ranboo, and Tubbo would be slaves to the overgrown weed. Not to mention that Techno had brought Tubbo to safety, just like he had promised. Then the rest of them had saved Tommy from bleeding to death...

Fuck. His migraine continued to push on the inside of his skull.

“Before I go on, I need to explain how my powers work,” Techno began. “I can master any weapon and have heightened abilities. However, there’s a reason for this. It’s because... um...” his eyes fell to the ground. “It’s because of the Voices.”

“Voices?” Tommy repeated. “What the hell are Voices?”

“Is it like the Egg?” Tubbo asked, worry in his tone.

“No, not at all,” Techno replied. “They only speak to me. They let me know how to do things or when people are going to attack me. The majority of the time, they are harmless and easy to control. But, there are certain situations, where they can be triggered to make me—um,” The swordsman paused, shoving his hands into his pockets to stop picking at them. “To make me mad.”

The red-eyed man’s body hit the ground with a sickening thump. Tommy clasped his hand over his mouth as the blood began to pool underneath the unmoving body.

Tommy tried to keep the image out of his mind, but he was unsuccessful.

Techno continued, “When I was younger, their most common trigger was seeing blood. I’ve been able to significantly reduce their reaction to it nowadays and I’ve been keeping them in line for a while... until that night. Honestly, they were being helpful in the fight with unknown assailants. But then one of them sprayed me in the face with some sort of powder or dust. Whatever it was, it triggered the Voices and before I knew it I had lost control.”

That’s putting it lightly , Tommy thought, holding his tongue.

“After that, I don’t remember much of that night until I woke up the next day,” Techno finished. Tommy silently let out a sigh of relief. His mind had no desire to rehash the part of the story that involved him.

Tommy then turned to Wilbur with a cold expression, “Why didn’t you stop him?”

“I would have, but he was gone before I turned around,” Wilbur replied. He let out a sigh. “There’s a lot of things I wish I could redo that night.”

“Vigilante—” Shockwave was cut off.

Tommy gripped his hair with sticky hands and his breathing began to quicken as more words tumbled out. “I should have never saved you! I just should have let fucking Dream arrest you! You should be rotting in jail! I thought I was doing something good! I thought was a better person, but instead, I just ruined everything!”

“Wait—”

“I’m selfish and stupid and so fucking dumb! I should have never done this! I can’t even trust my own best friend! And for what? To almost dying to the people I trusted instead? I’m ruining my life! I’ve ruined everything! I can’t—”

“ Tommy! ”

A sharp pain pulled him away from the memory as the taste of metal filled his mouth. Shit. He quickly wiped his lips with the back of his hand, leaving a small streak of blood.

“We later found out that the gang was terrorizing others in the area, forcing people to accept the Egg,” Wilbur went on.

“I know it’s not much,” Tubbo spoke up, “but the thing that they sprayed Techno with was probably some mixture of the Egg’s spores. That’s how they infected me too.”

“Spores... shit,” Wilbur creased his eyebrows together in thought. “With the speed they’re spreading, that makes sense. It’s fucking airborne.”

“Maybe we could make a cure for it?” Ranboo offered.

“That could take months,” Phil replied. “By then the whole city would be overrun.”

“Plus we can’t rely on a treatment. The Egg would simply try to stop us from spreading it,” Wilbur added. “We need to cut off the source of the problem. We have to get rid of the Egg.”

Ranboo turned towards Tubbo and asked, “Do you remember if the Egg had any weakness?”

“Um...” Tubbo voiced, “The only thing I can think of is that the Egg hated the heat. It was always freezing down there.”

“Hey, maybe a plan of Tommy’s can actually work,” Ranboo smiled at him. “We can set the Egg on fire. It’ll probably hate that.”

“We can’t take a chance at ‘probably,’” Wilbur interjected. “We need to make sure that whatever we do we can actually kill It.”

Tommy's stomach flipped. *Kill It* . The words echoed in his skull as a horrible thought floated to the top of his sewer of a mind.

"But what about the people who are connected to it?" Tommy asked, quietly.

"What about them?" Wilbur replied.

Tommy directed a serious glare in his direction. "What about the people who are infected by the fucking Egg? What happens to them when we kill It?"

"If we kill the mind-controlling plant then they should all be released from it."

Tommy's nails dug into his palms as he clasped his hands together. "Or what if we kill the main host and everyone connected to the host dies too."

A thick silence instantly covered the room. Tommy forced himself to breathe the heavy air as the moments dragged on slowly.

"We don't know if that will happen," Wilbur stated, breaking the stillness.

"But what if it does," Tommy snapped back. "You're the one who just said we can't take a chance on 'probably.'"

Wilbur ran his hand through his hair as he cursed softly, "What the fuck are we supposed to do?"

A few more uncomfortable seconds passed. Tommy's head was spinning now, trying to get a grip on a solution to this impossible task. He couldn't risk killing Tubbo along with the Egg. Everything they had all just gone through in the past 48 hours was to save Tubbo. There was no way in hell he was putting him in danger again. Tommy ground his teeth together as his mind failed to find an answer. He needed to do this. He needed to fix this problem. ~~A problem that he had caused. This was all his fault. He needed to fix everything. Everything needed to be fixed. Everything needed to start=~~

"You know what? Let's take a break!" Phil exclaimed. Everyone in the room looked at him with surprise on their faces.

"But we need to—" Wilbur began to protest, but Phil didn't let him finish.

He went on, "We have a bit more time to figure out the best course of action. Let's let Tubbo recover and see what else he remembers. Maybe that can help steer us in the right direction."

Wilbur sighed. "You're right. We should rest a bit. It would be good," he stared directly at Tommy as he continued, "*for all of us* ."

Tommy rolled his eyes as he scoffed, "Whatever."

Tubbo bumped him in the shoulder. "You need it the most. You look like you could star in a zombie apocalypse movie."

“You’re just mad that I would thrive in a zombie apocalypse.”

“Well, yeah. The zombies wouldn’t eat someone who doesn’t have a brain.”

“Hey!”

Tubbo replied with a laugh as Tommy sank back into his chair with a huff. Even though he was being endlessly bullied, the anxiety in his chest started to settle down. His headache had returned back to a dull lull, settling behind the bridge of his nose. He would never admit it to Wilbur, but he wasn’t completely against the idea of a nap.

Then Ranboo let out a small groan and planted his face into his hands. Tommy raised an eyebrow and asked, “You good?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. Something stupid,” Ranboo lifted his head with a strained smile. “I was just thinking about how I missed all my exams. I know it’s like the least of our problems, but it’s going to be a pain to explain later.”

“Ranboo, aren’t you a straight-A student?” Wilbur questioned.

The dual-colored-haired roommate dropped his gaze. “I don’t know if you could say that... I just try my best and I get good grades...”

“Then I bet you have nothing to worry about,” Wilbur replied. “If it comes down to it, I can talk to Headmaster Eret.”

“I promise we won’t revoke your ‘nerd license’ if you get a B in biology,” Tommy added.

“Well, I’m glad I get to keep my license since I’m the one tutoring you in biology,” Ranboo raised his head with a smirk. “Don’t you still need to get your license to read? Oh wait, you failed it.”

“Where are the fucking socks?!” Tommy blurted, jumping to his feet. “I need to throw something at his giant bitch head!”

“Woah! Woah!” Tubbo held his hands up between his roommates. He was horrible at keeping his laughter in as he went on, “Do not throw things! Sit down!”

Tommy flipped off Ranboo as he begrudgingly sat down with an exaggerated frown. Ranboo happily mirrored his roommate’s gesture with a smile. Tommy shot a death glare at the other occupants of the room as he heard more stifled laughter from by the door.

“I thought I was out only for a day?” Tubbo wondered, turning to Ranboo. “How is finals week already over?”

“You were unconscious for a day, but you were also with the Egg for a few days before that,” Ranboo answered. “I guess time flies by when you’ve been kidnapped by an evil cult.”

Tubbo paused as his smile faded. After a few beats, he asked, “What day is it?”

“Um, I’m not completely sure,” Ranboo said before glancing over at Wilbur.

Wilbur hesitated for a second before checking the communicator on his wrist. “It’s Friday.”

Suddenly, the color drained away from Tubbo’s face. He stuttered out, “F-Friday? You mean it’s the Friday of finals week?”

Tommy frowned as he replied, “Yeah?”

“If it’s Friday then tomorrow is the second Saturday of December,” Tubbo’s voice trembled. “That means that the Winter Hero Festival is tomorrow too.”

Tommy had completely forgotten about the Winter Hero Festival. These past few weeks had been a bit busy with the kidnapping and being on the run and almost dying *twice*. He gave himself a pass for not thinking about the city’s bi-annual celebration of heroes. The majority of the city would line the streets to watch performers, giant balloons and parade floats pass by. It was basically a glorified publicity stunt for children to buy more merchandise of their favorite heroes, but that didn’t stop people from coming out in the cold to wave at random heroes on paper-mache-decorated trucks. Tommy had only gone in person once with one of his nicer foster families (before they had gotten fed up with him like the rest). They had even gotten him a hot chocolate. It was one of his few nice childhood memories.

Right now though, he had a horrible feeling about the festival.

“Fuck...” Tubbo softly continued, “I- I think I just remembered something.”

All eyes were on him as Tubbo squeezed his eyes closed and rubbed his temples. The anticipation was suffocating.

Finally, Wilbur asked the question that was on everyone’s mind. “What did you remember?”

Tubbo looked up with a pained expression. “The Egg is going to attack the festival. It’s going to infect the entire city *tomorrow*.”

—

Tommy pushed around the noodles in his bowl of soup. Charlie had asked him what his favorite soup was, but Tommy didn’t really have one. So he had blurted out chicken noodle soup. He sighed and set down his spoon. Even after forcing himself to eat a few bites of the soggy noodles, his joints still ached each time he moved. He needed a lot more than soup to fix his current problems.

“Do you want me to ask the kitchen to make you something different?” Ranboo asked from beside him.

They were sitting together at a table in one of the breakrooms of the casino. It seemed like Quackity had ordered his employees to avoid the basement because Tommy hadn’t seen anyone besides people he knew. Across the room from them, Wilbur, Techno, and Phil were softly whispering.

Tommy shook his head. “Nah, I’m fine. I’m just not that hungry.”

“Yeah, me neither,” Ranboo glanced at the criminals, “What do you think they’re talking about?”

“Who cares,” Tommy muttered. “It’s not like it matters.”

“I guess...”

Tommy squeezed his eyes closed. He felt a pressure push against the backs of his eyes. Tubbo had urged them to leave his room to make a plan. Tommy was reluctant to leave him alone, but Tubbo wouldn’t take no for an answer. He was dead set on thinking that they could actually do something about the attack on the festival.

However, Tommy knew better. It was fucking hopeless. They had no time. They had no manpower. They had no fucking idea what they were doing. The only thing they had was bland-ass chicken noodle soup that *he couldn’t even keep down because a fucking metal rod went through his fucking stomach*—

“So we talked,” Wilbur’s voice rang out, “and we have a plan.”

Tommy looked up to see him and Phil come up to the table. Techno continued to lean against the counter near the sink while the former teacher took a seat and Phil stood next to him.

“Really?” Ranboo replied, the spark of hope in his eyes was far too bright for Tommy.

Wilbur briefly caught Tommy’s eye before looking away. He went on, “Yeah, but you two aren’t involved.”

Instantly, Ranboo’s spark was snuffed. “Why not?”

On the other hand, Tommy didn’t have the energy to fight this. The moment Tubbo spoke of the attack, it was like every thought in his brain had been frozen. The cold numbness had slowly consumed his body and it took every fiber of his being to do a single action. So he kept his mouth shut, reserving the energy to try to eat another spoon of soup.

“The plan’s risky and we can’t afford either of you being captured by the Egg.”

“What kind of risk?”

Wilbur sighed as he clasped his hands together and rested his chin on them. “We’re planning to attack the festival.”

Confusion spread across Tommy’s face as he blurted, “What?”

Ranboo matched his expression and he followed up, “I’m sorry. Did you just say that you guys are going to *attack the festival*?”

“Not to mention,” Tommy continued, his frown deepening, “isn’t that the exact thing we’re *trying to avoid*?”

Phil put his hands up in defense. “Don't worry! We're not going to attack anyone. We just want to give enough of a scare so that they evacuate the area.”

“Oh,” Ranboo nodded in understanding, “you're just planning to stop the festival so the Egg can't do anything there.”

“Pretty much,” Wilbur confirmed. “We don't want you guys to get caught in the crossfire, so it's best if you just stay—”

“How does that defeat the Egg though?” Tommy snapped, a scowl replacing his confusion.

Wilbur met his eyes with a somber look. “It doesn't. We're just buying ourselves more time.”

“There's no fucking way...” Tommy let out a humorless laugh. A wave of hot anger crashed over his frozen mind. He continued through his teeth, “You didn't even make a real fucking plan. You're just postponing this fucking nightmare.”

“We can't fight the Egg right now,” Wilbur explained. “We need more time.”

“Time? *Time?*” He failed to keep his voice level. “What the fuck do you expect to do with all the fucking time you're going to get when you're *rotting in jail* after the fucking heroes *arrest you for terrorism ?!*”

“Tommy, I understand that this is hard—” Phil attempted to speak, but Tommy didn't want to hear any more bullshit.

He slammed his hands down on the table, rattling the bowls. “No! This is a fucking joke! Every minute that that stupid Egg is here, the more and more people it infects! If you're going to make a fucking plan then make a plan that actually has a chance of working! If you're going to give people hope then don't fucking half-ass it!”

“We're trying our best!” Wilbur shouted back, his voice rising to the same level as Tommy's for a moment.

Tommy involuntarily winced at the volume, as if his body expected the vibrations to send him flying. Wilbur's expression immediately dimmed with guilt. He dropped his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, “We want a full-proof idea to take out the Egg too, but now, we have a deadline. It's just not possible right now, but if we do this then...”

Blood roared in Tommy's ears. If the others were talking he couldn't hear them anymore. Each of his thoughts pounded along with his heart.

Try.

Try.

Try.

Try again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

All he ever did was try.

And what did that ever give him? Pain? Suffering? Death? What was he even trying to achieve any more?

Once, he tried to achieve hope. Hope for a better L'Manburg. Hope for a better Logstedshire. Hope for a better future. Hope for a better Tommy.

And there was a moment where he saw it. He saw the hope. It would look like he was back in his dorm room with his best friends, ignoring their homework and getting whiplash from their joint music playlist. Tubbo and Ranboo would try to convince Tommy that a capybara was a fictional animal. And he would probably believe them, but not before threatening to throw them out the window. Then for a few hours, he'd jump across rooftops, the wind stinging his cheeks. He would stop a petty thief and make a quip as he stuck them to a wall. But then once the sky became dark, he'd meet Tubbo and Ranboo on a roof in Logsteadshire. They'd watch the stars travel across the sky. They would hate once the sunrise pushed the stars away to reveal orange-misted clouds, but it was okay. They would be back.

Maybe the next day the rest of his friends could come. They could bring some books to read.

But,

just like every other attempt,

like every other hope,

it all burned away into nothing.

All that was left was the emptiness echoing in the shell he called a body.

Tommy pressed his palms into his eyes. And just like that he used up the last of his energy in a useless fight. A fight that he couldn't even fucking finish. The rage seeped out of him and the ice crusted over his thoughts instantly.

What was the point? Why was he even pushing every cell in his body to its limit? What had he almost died for? A city that wanted to arrest him? Criminals who wanted to betray him? A hero who forced him to open a portal and let a mind-controlling monster into their dimension? Friends who would be much safer without him?

His spiral of thoughts paused.

A portal.

Dream had made Tommy open a portal to another dimension.

He removed his hands from his face and stared at them. His fingers began to tingle as the cloudy memory surfaced in his mind. He did do it. He opened the portal. The gate.

And Dream had been there.

Tommy shook away the thought. He couldn't afford to think about that asswipe at the moment.

He needed to focus on himself. The part of him that opened the gate and brought the monster here.

The part of him that could—

"Send it back," Tommy whispered.

"Tommy?" Ranboo asked gently.

He snapped his head up, "I'm going to send it back."

"What?" Wilbur voiced with his eyebrows creased with confusion.

Phil's expression matched his son's as he followed up, "Are you talking about the Egg?"

"Yes," Tommy confirmed with a serious look. He could feel his brain finally cracking through the ice. He repeated, "I am going to send it back to its dimension."

Ranboo pressed on, concern filling his eyes, "But you don't know how to—"

"But I did. I did it once. I can do it again."

"But the Egg is attacking the city in less than 24 hours," Wilbur countered. "We don't have the time for you to relearn how to open interdimensional gates."

"I can do it!" Tommy pushed himself to his feet. His pulse was racing, making his whole body warm with energy. "This is the only way to make sure that the Egg can't hurt anyone else! If I send it back then we can cut off its connection to the infected without killing it!"

"I don't doubt you can do that eventually," Wilbur shook his head. "But right now, we have to think realistically—"

"Your plan is fucking stupid! You're going to get yourselves arrested or even worse!"

"Your plan is impossible! You can't open a portal to another dimension!"

"Yes, I can!"

"We can't risk you being exposed to the Egg! We're not taking that chance!"

"This is my choice! I am the only one that can fucking do this!"

"Why are you—"

“Let him do it,” Techno’s voice cut him off.

Everyone shifted their attention to the quiet swordsman.

Wilbur snapped back, “What?”

“Let him do it,” Techno repeated. “If he believes that he can send it back, then I believe him too.”

A warmth hummed behind Tommy’s chest. Not the painful, searing heat that was usually there, but a different one. One that he hadn’t felt in quite a while.

Wilbur ran his hand through his hair. “What about the festival? What if he doesn’t open it in time?”

Techno shrugged. “You always come up with something.”

Wilbur sprang to his feet, his voice rising, “There’s no fucking way—”

Phil stepped in front of his son, stopping him with his hands. “Hey, hey! No one said we can’t do both plans. We can stop the festival and buy some time for Tommy. If it doesn’t work then we’ll fall back to the rest of the original plan.”

Wilbur instinctively opened his mouth to respond but paused at Phil’s idea. He pressed his mouth into a thin line.

Tommy crossed his arms and mumbled, “I don’t need your permission to do this anyway.”

“Are you volunteering to fight off all the Egg cultists while attempting to open a portal?” Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Whatever,” Tommy frowned.

“The strategy will stay the same then,” Phil continued. “We will attack while Tommy confronts the Egg. However, one of us will have to go with him.”

Tommy twisted towards his old boss. No. This was his fault. He had to do this by himself. There was too much risk if someone else came with him. He could never live with himself if something happened to any of them because of his powers.

Any of them.

Fuck. He wasn’t supposed to care what happened to them. They were nothing but criminals to him. Nothing more.

Nausea crept up his throat as his stomach did a flip. His heart and his mind were at odds again. Then again when weren’t they both trying to make Tommy go insane. However, he did not have the stamina or time to figure out how he felt. He barely had the energy for this new determination invading his body.

It was easier to let the anger take over rather than navigate his murky emotions. It was always easier to do that.

“I don’t to be fucking supervised!” Tommy pushed back.

“I can go with him,” Ranboo offered and Tommy glared at his roommate.

“No, you should go help Phil and Wilbur with the festival. If things go awry you can help people evacuate,” Techno stated. “I’ll go with him.”

Tommy tried again, “I never said I needed someone—”

“I hate to say it but I’m not sure how long we can hold off the heroes if you’re not there, Techno,” Phil protested, ignoring Tommy. “I can go with Tommy while the three of you fight.”

“Don’t be stupid, Phil,” Wilbur cut in. “You’re useless underground and we can’t have Techno having another reaction to the Egg. If we’re actually going to do this then I’m going with him—”

“Hey!” Tommy shouted and all three heads turned towards him. “I don’t need anyone to go with me!”

Ranboo worriedly began to ask, “But Tommy, what if someone attacks—”

“Then I’ll fucking handle it!”

He allowed his defiance to bubble to the surface, overflowing into the forefront of his mind. If he was going to fight, then he was going all in.

Wilbur spoke in a level tone, “We can’t let you go down to the Egg alone. It’s too dangerous.”

“Alone? Really?” The warmth in his chest twisted into a blaze. He didn’t need to force anything as it dug its claws up his spine, drenching him in heat. Each word seared his vocal cords, “You didn’t have a problem leaving me alone after your partner almost fucking killed me! You seemed to enjoy cutting me off and slamming a door in my face!”

Pain instantly filled Wilbur’s face, but Tommy continued to ravage, “Why can’t you just give up this fucking act?! Why are you doing this to me?!”

“What do you want from me, Tommy?” Wilbur asked softly.

“I want you to get off my fucking back! I want you to stop thinking you know what’s best for me! I want you to stop making me feel like I can trust you!”

He had tried to push the anger down. He had tried to find peace. He had tried to forgive. He had tried to rebuild the boat. He had even tried to let the cold numbness consume him. He had tried and tried and tried and tried, but it had been useless. It had always been useless. This was inevitable.

“But you know what I really want?” Tommy spat out, each word dripping with venom. “ *I want nothing to do with you!* ”

He shoved the table away from him. The bowl spun off the table and soup spilled on the tile as he slammed the door behind him.

—

His legs were moving on their own. He didn’t know where he was and he didn’t really care. His pulse was rushing against his eardrums, as he made his way down the empty hallway. His nails dug into his palms to keep himself from punching the barren walls. He tried focusing on his breathing, but every muscle in his body had its own mind.

With each step, it was like the walls and ceiling were closing in on him. He knew this wasn’t true, but breathing continued to speed up. His heart reverberated every cell in his skull as he clung to the few coherent thoughts he had left.

Shit. The pounding began to bang harder and harder. ~~*The pressure was suffocating him. It was going to kill him. He was going to die.*~~

Fuck. *Fuck.* He squeezed his eyes shut and gripped the wall to keep himself upright. He wanted to crawl up into a ball and hide. His body ached for a moment of solace. ~~*It ached for a familiar soft hum. He wanted the soothing vibrations to calm his loud mind.*~~

No. He didn’t deserve relief. He made the choices that led him here and this was it. Isn’t this what he asked for? He had pushed away the people he cared for. He had thought that it would be easier if he did. And here he was, suffering in an empty basement hallway. Alone.

It didn’t matter that Ranboo and Tubbo had forgiven him. It didn’t matter that Wilbur, Phil, and Techno lied to him. The truth still hammered against his chest over and over and over again.

This was all his fault.

This was his fault.

His fault.

He was the problem.

He had always been the problem. ~~*He needed to let go.*~~

He was weak. ~~*He could be powerful.*~~

It was hopeless. ~~*It was hopeless.*~~

He was a mistake. ~~*He could fix his mistakes.*~~

Everything was wrong. ~~*Everything needed to be erased.*~~

~~*He needed to let go.*~~

~~*He needed to let go.*~~

~~*He needed to let go.*~~

~~*He needed to*~~

“Hey, kid! What did I say about roaming around the hallways?” A voice sounded from behind him.

“What?” Tommy snapped his head up, sending a sharp strain down his neck as a result. He grabbed his neck, “fuck...”

“You okay?” Quackity came up beside him with a concerned frown. “Damn, you look like shit.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy muttered as he attempted to stand without the wall. “You shouldn’t swear at your students.”

“I’m not your fucking teacher right now. I have a life outside of school,” Quackity scoffed before raising an eyebrow, “Have you been doing what Charlie told you to do? Like, drink soup, rest, and shit?”

“Yes, I have. So stop pestering me.” Tommy tried to step forward, but Quackity blocked his way. “What the hell do you want?”

The Spanish teacher crossed his arms. “I already told you. You’re not supposed to be roaming the hallways. This is a business. I can’t have a kid disturbing patrons. Go back to the clinic and I’ll call Charlie to bring you some soup.”

“No! I don’t want any more damn soup! I need to get the fuck out of here!” Tommy burst. Quackity’s eyes went wide in surprise and regret instantly made his cheeks warm. He quietly began to apologize, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

Quackity raised his hand. “I get it. The soup here isn’t even that good. As for leaving, no one is holding you hostage. You are free to go whenever you want. There’s an exit in the kitchen.”

“Oh,” Tommy sheepishly lowered his head. “I didn’t know that.”

A few beats passed as Tommy uncomfortably shuffled in place. He should leave. He should remove himself from the few friends he had left before they got hurt. *He already hurt them. They resented him.* Ranboo and Tubbo would be fine. They would take care of each other. It would be better this way.

Yet,

“You can’t leave your friends, can you?” Quackity asked, a smirk spreading across his face.

Tommy scowled as he uttered, “Fuck you.”

“You know what? Follow me,” Quackity turned and headed down the hallway.

Tommy trailed behind as he wondered, “Um, where are we going?”

“You’ll see.”

Tommy was a bit hesitant to follow Quackity to Prime knows where, but then again he didn’t have anything better to do. Plus he’d rather deal with whatever bullshit Quackity wanted to show him rather than be sent back to the breakroom. The trip was quick as they turned a few corners, passed the kitchen, and went down a flight of stairs before reaching a metal door.

“You’re not going to open this door and a bunch of heroes are going to arrest me, right?” Tommy asked.

“The heroes would never enter from a side door. They like to make an entrance when they want to annoy the fuck out of me,” Quackity replied. He then turned with a sly look, “Now crime lords who would love your reward money on the other hand...”

“Don’t fucking joke about that!” Tommy huffed as an ugly taste filled his mouth.

Quackity held his hands up in defense. “Sorry, sorry! I can’t help it!”

“Die,” Tommy might be on the brink of a breakdown, but at least his comebacks never missed a beat.

“You wish, Vigilante,” Quackity then pushed open the door.

Tommy’s next epic comeback was cut off by the sight of the room. He wasn’t really imagining anything specific, but he still felt a bit surprised to see a gym. There were a few exercise machines and weights near the back next to a wall of mirrors. On the other side, there were some punching bags and foam mats on the ground. No champagne fountains, no slot machines that double as rowing machines, no flashing spotlights with dancers and loud music, just a regular gym.

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. “There’s a gym under your casino?”

“There’s a lot of shit under my casino, but yes, this is one of the gyms.”

“How many gyms do you need for a casino?”

“I will let you know that Las Nevdas isn’t just a casino! It is a lifestyle! We support our clients with any and all needs—” Quackity cleared his throat, cutting himself off. “I’m getting off-topic. This one is usually for my employees, but no one uses it. So you can stay here instead of the clinic.”

“Why the hell do you think I would want to stay at a gym?”

“You look like you’re going to punch a hole in a wall and I cannot have you punching a hole in one of my walls.”

“Fuck you! I don’t want to punch a wall!” Tommy snapped loudly. *Shit*. He continued in a much softer tone, “I don’t need you to do anything for me.”

“You don’t have to use it if you don’t want to,” Quackity shrugged, “but you have to decide to stay here or go back to the clinic. I will chain you to a bed if I see you wandering around again.”

“You wouldn’t actually chain a kid to—”

“Don’t fucking test me.”

“Okay! Okay! Fine! I’ll stay here!” His steps echoed as he walked onto the concrete floor. “So what should I do if I need to leave or go to the bath—”

“Don’t care,” Quackity interrupted and let the metal door slam close behind him.

The sound echoed for a moment before silence quickly settled in. It hadn’t been quiet like this for a while. After hours of counting the beeps and chirps of machines and monitors, it was weird having the hum of white noise prick his eardrums. He took a deep breath in and let the stillness enter his lungs. Maybe it would help alleviate his head. His breath whistled as he let the air out, but the headache continued to throb.

Guess that’s going to be the only constant in life now , Tommy thought.

He made his way to the foam mats and kicked off his shoes before pancaking onto his back. He stared at the high ceiling. The lack of paneling allowed him to see all the pipes and beams crisscrossing in a mesmerizing design. Some would consider the exposed roof a mess, but Tommy liked it. It was much more interesting than a plain ceiling could ever be.

It reminded him of the little piles of books at the ends of the shelves. Some customers would look confused at their placement but they still would tilt their heads to look at the spines. It didn’t matter that the books were in the wrong place, they were still books. People didn’t care that they were a mess.

But humans didn’t have that thinking when it came to other humans, did they?

Tommy covered his face with his hands and let out a groan. Maybe if he lay here long enough his never-ending thoughts would seep through his ears and out of his brain. It could get even better if the mat just consumed him whole and he never had to confront any of his problems ever again.

This is probably how Ozymandias felt when he saw his giant statue broken and shit in the middle of the desert. He had tried so hard to be remembered as a powerful ruler but reality sent him flying backwards. In the end, his memory crumbled up and was barely remembered by an audience of a far-off traveler.

Just like the so-called king of kings, Tommy was never in charge of his destiny.

Dream's voice was filled with pity, "I have to keep watch of you because someone needs to be there to clean up your messes. The only reason I let you roam around freely this whole time as Vigilante is that it would have been a bigger mess to clean if I kept you bottled up in a cell."

He was destined to be a mess.

It was what he left no matter where he was. Every foster family. Every school. Every friendship. There was always a point where people would leave him alone with the mess he created. They left and never came back.

His legacy was one of loneliness.

A shiver shook his body as he sat up. He then caught a glance of himself in a mirror from across the room. Quackity was right. He looked like shit. He barely recognized the person he saw. His hair was dull and stringy and his plain shirt was swallowing him, making his body seem smaller than it was. But the thing that was the most striking was his eyes.

Usually, he hated how his eyes gave away every emotion he had ever felt in his life.

But the eyes that stared back at him looked nothing like he remembered.

Instead, they just looked so... hollow.

He forced his head down and let out a deep sigh. A part of him wanted to lay back down and never get up. It would be easy to let the fatigue overtake him. He could sink into the void of nothing and never feel a single thing. Nothing could ever hurt him again. ***He needed to let it all go.***

Yet, Tommy was never one to take the easy way out of things, was he?

He pushed himself to his feet with a stretch. He had one last job he needed to finish. He brought that stupid fucking Egg into this world and he was the one who was going to take it out.

I simply need to figure out how to open a portal to another dimension , Tommy thought. It can't be that hard...right?

He began to rub his hands together and he widened his stance. Maybe he just needed to believe that the gate would open. Easy enough. He squeezed his eyes shut as he willed his hands to make a portal. He needed a portal. He was opening a portal. He was opening a portal. Portal. Portal. Portal. He threw his arms forward as he felt something inside of him come to the surface.

And then,

a fart echoed through the empty room.

Tommy sheepishly lowered his arms. Well, at least it was nice to know that his bowels were still functioning after being impaled in the gut.

He ran his hand through his hair, tugging at the knots. He knew he could do it, but he didn't even know where to begin. Closing his eyes again, he thought back to the dreams that had plagued him for months. The details were foggy, but he knew that Dream had been there with him. Dream forced him to open the gate.

He began to open and close his hands into fists. No. Dream didn't force him to do anything. Back then, Tommy would have jumped off a building if he told him that it helped the city. That's all he ever wanted. He wanted to be strong enough to help. ~~**He was strong. He needed to stop holding back.**~~

The whirl of the air conditioning unit sounded and a gust of cold flooded the gym. His body trembled in the new temperature and he started to rub his hands on his arms. This didn't help much as a familiar numbness entered his feet.

He paused.

It was familiar, but something about the feeling was off. He stepped off the mat onto the concrete. The freezing stone sent a chill up his spine, but there was still something wrong with it. He bent down and pulled off his socks. His toes immediately curled in, recoiling at the cold sting.

That. That was it. He knew that feeling.

He widened his stance and outstretched his arms. Leveling his breath, Tommy focused on the cold energy as it crawled up his limbs. He held on to the uncomfortable feeling, allowing it to seep into his veins. The icy sensation burned his legs while he clenched his jaw shut. He needed to hold on to the feeling ~~**and let go of everything else.**~~ He needed to push through the pain ~~**It would all be over soon.**~~ His muscles screamed as he gripped the forces around him. He needed to do this. He was strong enough to do this. ~~**He was strong. Stop holding back. Rip it apart. Let it all be destroyed. Must start again. Everything needed to start again and be=**~~

A loud bang of the metal door jerked Tommy away from his thoughts. A gasp escaped his throat as his knees gave out under him and he dropped to the ground. His whole body was wet with a sticky sweat before it returned to its normal temperature. Invisible needles prickled his hands while he leveled his breathing.

Well, that felt like shit, he thought.

"Are you okay?!" A voice came up behind him. Still disoriented by the pain, his brain couldn't identify who it was.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," He grunted. He could feel eyes on his back as he pulled himself to his feet. How did anyone even find him? Quackity wasn't really advertising where this gym was. The only people who'd be wondering where he was were his roommates. Tubbo would have already started yelling at him the moment he walked through the door so that left only one other person.

He let out a sigh before continuing, “I know it was stupid of me to argue with them, but I don’t want a lecture, Ranboo.”

“Good thing I’m not Ranboo then.”

Tommy twisted around to see Wilbur standing a few feet away from him.

The criminal gave a strained smile and continued, “Hey.”

Tommy was stunned for a moment as his brain rebooted. What the hell was Wilbur doing here? Hadn’t he just yelled at him multiple times in the past hour? How big of a dumbass was this guy to not realize that Tommy did not want to see him?!

“What do you want?” Tommy replied coldly.

Wilbur took a step forward and with a serious tone said, “I want you to hit me.”

Tommy frowned in confusion. “What?”

“I want you to hit me.”

“Why the fuck would I hit you?”

“Just hit me,” Wilbur took another step.

Tommy instantly stepped backward, shaking his head. “I’m not going to hit you, dumbass!”

“Why not?!” Wilbur’s voice began to raise, but there was no anger in it. “You hate me, right? So just fucking hit me!”

Tommy’s tone immediately matched the criminal’s, “I don’t hate you! I just– I– I don’t know– fuck! But I don’t want to fight you!”

“No! We need to do this!” Wilbur shot back. “I’m not going back to icing each other out! We need to fight! We need to scream and punch and hit each other!”

“You can do whatever the fuck you want, but I would be perfectly fine if you just left me alone!”

“Well, I’m not! I’m not fine leaving you alone! I don’t give a shit about your weird self-sacrificial complex! Last time I left you alone, I’ve regretted it every day since!”

“I never–” but a memory stopped him.

Tommy’s voice exploded as anger shook his body, “NO! DON’T SAY ANOTHER FUCKING WORD! I want nothing to do with you! None of you! I don’t fucking care what you know! I don’t care! You all are fucking insane! Don’t touch me! Don’t speak to me! I don’t want you or your fucking partners to ever come near me ever again. And that is a fucking threat.”

A few seconds of awkward silence passed between them as their voices reverberated off the walls. Wilbur let out a sigh before continuing with a softer tone, “After Techno’s incident, all three of us made the decision to cut ourselves out of your life. We convinced ourselves it was for your protection. Looking back, I have no idea why I thought pushing you away would make your life any safer. You’re a vigilante for Prime’s sake. All it ended up doing was hurting you even more.” He dropped his head, breaking eye contact. “I think... I think I was scared that you would hate us if you knew who we were. Irony, I know, since it only made everything so much worse.”

Tommy was at a loss for words. All his thoughts were starstruck by Wilbur’s outburst.

He continued to stare, dumbfounded, as Wilbur went on, “Listen, if you truly never want to talk to me again, I will respect your boundaries. But whatever middle ground we’re currently on, it is not working.”

Still a bit dazed, Tommy forced out, “I don’t know what to say.”

“Why don’t you give it a shot? You were doing pretty well in the breakroom. You’re allowed to be mad so be fucking mad.”

“What if I don’t want to be mad anymore?!” Tommy snapped. His surprise had blended into the murky emotions making his head spin. “What if I’m fucking tired of people telling me they know what’s best for me?! What if I just want someone to give me a clear fucking answer?! Is that so hard?!”

Tommy gripped his hair. He was in the grey again. He was practically drowning in the grey. Not white, not black, but grey. Only grey. He fucking hated the grey. He hated it so much that he was about to rip his hair out to just feel something besides grey. He just wanted to feel anything else! *Why the fuck couldn’t his brain just decide –*

Wilbur’s voice gently rang out, “Okay. Then ask a question.”

He lifted his head up. “What?”

“You want answers. But you first need to ask a question. So what do you want to know?”

Tommy paused, choosing his next words wisely. After a few moments, he asked carefully, “How long have you known about me?”

“After the first night on the docks. When I offered to teach you.”

“You’ve known for that long? How the hell did you even know it was me? Was it my voice? Did you memorize my fucking voice?”

Wilbur let out a nervous laugh. “Not exactly...”

Tommy crossed his arms over his chest as he pressed, “Then how did you know?”

“You know when I said to ask questions, I thought you were going to ask things like ‘why are you a villain instead of a hero?’ or ‘what happened between you and Dream?’”

“I don’t give a shit about your backstory,” he scoffed. “Why are you being so weird about how you found out my identity? It is something fucked up? Shit, did you do something fucked up to find out my identity?”

Wilbur rolled his eyes, “No, I did not do something fucked up. It’s just kind of... embarrassing.”

“What do you mean by ‘embarrassing’?” Tommy narrowed his eyes.

“If I tell you, you can’t make a big deal about it. Okay?”

“I never make a big deal of anything!”

Wilbur waved away the sarcastic reply before continuing, “My powers are incredibly sensitive. There are a lot of sounds in the world. It can be hard to differentiate them. Obviously, I eventually learned how to tune out irrelevant sounds and only listen to what I wanted. However, when I was growing up, going outside was basically an overstimulated hell. So in response, I started to memorize certain sounds that would help ground myself. Weirdly enough, the sounds that helped the most ended up being Phil’s and Techno’s heartbeats.”

“What do their heartbeats have to do with learning my—” Suddenly, realization flooded Tommy’s mind. There was no way. A smirk crept onto his face.

“I said you can’t make a big deal out of it!”

“You’re so fucking soft, Wilbur! How many more people’s heartbeats are you obsessed with?”

“I’m not obsessed with them! I only memorize the heartbeats of people that I care about, you little prick.”

Tommy threw his hands into the air. “I can’t believe anyone thinks you’re threatening when you do shit like this.”

“Big talk for the person who literally had a building dropped on him to save me.”

“I only did that because I would have never heard the end of it if I let a building crush you! You probably would have made me write an essay about the experience!”

“You understand that your heart beats faster when you lie, right?”

“You know what? I think I will punch you!” And before Wilbur could reply, Tommy lept at him with his fist swinging in the air.

Wilbur easily dodged, sending Tommy behind him. Tommy frowned as he lightly chuckled, “Why would you announce that you’re going to hit someone?”

“Announce my ass!”

“That doesn’t even make– UGH!” Wilbur was cut off by Tommy slamming into him.

The two of them were sent backward and landed on the foam mat in a pile with a *thud* . Wilbur immediately pushed Tommy off and Tommy’s back seized at the sudden movement. He let out a groan, but at the same time, Wilbur also let out a pained sound. Tommy smiled at his discomfort.

“How was that?” Tommy breathed out as he sprawled out on the floor.

“You’re a fucking child,” Wilbur muttered as he sat up.

“You asked me to do it!”

“I didn’t think you’d tackle me?!”

“Well, you deserved it!”

Wilbur sighed. “Yeah, I did... Are you going to tackle Techno next?”

“Fuck no, that guy’s built like a brick wall. I don’t want to have all my bones shattering on impact.”

His former teacher let out a soft laugh. “That’s valid. He’s a fucking tank.”

“I knew I could take you down though because you’re a glorified mashing machine.”

“How long did it take your two brain cells to come up with that one?”

“I’m going to shit in your shoes.”

“What is wrong with you?”

“When you least expect it, *BAM* ! There will be shit in your shoes.”

“I’m not engaging in this.”

“Engage deez n–”

“Yeah, so this is an example of a sound that is irrelevant.”

“My words are very relevant! You should always be listening to them!” Tommy countered with a frown.

Wilbur shook his head disappointedly as a reply. Quiet filled the air again with the exception of a soft hum of the vents. Tommy closed his eyes and let out a deep breath. He wasn’t sure when, but at some point, his muscles stopped straining and his body was soaking up the relief. He hadn’t been able to breathe this deeply in weeks.

Then Wilbur broke the silence. “I heard your heart stop.”

Tommy instantly sat up. “What?”

Wilbur continued to stare at the foam and replied, “When we first got to the casino, your heart stopped. Luckily Charlie was there to bring you back, but for a second you-” He let out a slow breath to keep his voice from quivering, “You died.”

All Tommy could muster out was, “Oh.”

“Listen, Tommy, I don’t know where we’re going from here,” Wilbur softly started, “but please know, I’m so s—”

“No, no, no,” Tommy interrupted. Even the thought of Wilbur saying those words made him squeamish. “This is weird.”

“But—”

“I don’t like how you’re saying it. It’s all wrong.”

“I want to apologize for my actions, you little shit!”

“Well, you’re doing a terrible job.”

“Because you keep interrupting me!”

“Then talk faster!”

“Are YOU KIDDING—” Wilbur stopped himself and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Listen, I really am s—”

“Seriously, just stop,” Tommy shook his head. “You don’t need to say it. It isn’t you.”

Wilbur looked at him with a faint smile, “Maybe I just started.”

“Maybe you should start by changing your ugly balding head first.”

Wilbur palmed Tommy’s face and pushed him to the ground.

“What the hell?! I am a person who died! You can’t just shove people who died!”

“And you’re never going to shut up about it.”

“Obviously not! I died! But then I lived, bitch! You’re never getting rid of me!”

“Good, now you have another chance to learn how to read.”

“Fuck you! I know how to read!”

Wilbur shrugged, “Debatable.”

“I’m going to shit in your shoes,” Tommy mumbled, bringing his knees to his chin.

“Sure, you are,” the teacher replied with a side-eye.

The familiar lull passed through them again. However, as his adrenaline from the fight wore off, his anxiety began to turn his gut.

"I opened the gate for Dream. He told me to do it so I did," Tommy softly admitted. He lowered his head until his knees hid his face. "I would have done anything for him."

Wilbur carefully answered, "You don't have to listen to him anymore."

"I know. I know... but at one point I wanted to. I wanted to help him. I wanted to do anything I could because I trusted him. And I thought he trusted me but... I guess that wasn't true."

"Are you asking me if I trust you? Because I promise I do! I promise that I will never hide things from you again."

"And I really appreciate that but... how do I know you're not just saying that? You had no problem lying to me before. Dream had no problem with that either," Tommy looked up and met Wilbur's eyes. "How do I know you won't use me and then throw me aside like Dream?"

Wilbur opened his mouth but paused before dropping his eyes to the ground. A few seconds passed before he finally answered, "You don't. At least not right now. And that's okay. You don't need to trust us."

"But I want to trust you. I want to care about you guys without feeling so emotionally constipated! I'm so fucking constipated! Wait... Shit! You know what I meant!"

Wilbur stifled a laugh as he went on, "Yes, I know what you mean, but my point still stands. Your hesitation is valid. We lied to you and then iced you out with no explanation, not to mention, I said some awful things to you. That's all solid ground for you to hate us for the rest of your life."

"I don't hate you, though. I hate my feelings. It's like they're destroying my brain..." He trailed off. After a moment, he breathed, "I don't know what to do."

"Forgiveness is not magic. It's a skill. It takes time and energy to cultivate. It may not come naturally now, but it will. But you have to let it in. Before you can share it with others, you must start by forgiving yourself."

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows as his gut twisted, "I have no idea what you're talking about. I am super epic and cool and you're old and balding."

Then Wilbur punched Tommy in the arm.

"Ow! You can't do that!" Tommy whined. "I died!"

"What I'm trying to say is that you don't need to know how you feel about us yet. Take all the time you need. Let us prove to you that you can trust us," his voice sounded genuine. And maybe Tommy believed it this time.

"Thanks, Wilbur."

“No problem,” He replied with a soft smile, before continuing, “But you should get that constipation checked out. When’s the last time you shit?”

Tommy attempted to kick Wilbur, but the teacher just dodged. “Oh fuck you! You know what I meant!”

—

“Are you sure you don’t want to go to your own room?” Wilbur asked as they walked up to Tubbo’s clinic room.

Tommy shook his head. “If everything goes to shit, I’d rather spend my final hours with Tubbo and Ranboo.”

“It’s not going to go to shit,” Wilbur defended. “We’re going to fix this *together* .”

But I’m the only one who can open the gate , Tommy thought. And if I don’t, then we’re all going to be fucked.

Instead, he said, “Yeah, sure.”

Tommy placed his hand on the handle but then paused. He felt like he was forgetting something.

“Are you going to go inside?” Wilbur questioned.

And then it hit him. He turned back to Wilbur and asked, “Are Phil and Techno still in the breakroom?”

“Uh, probably?”

Tommy twisted around and quickly headed down the hallway. Wilbur trailed behind him, shouting, “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, I just remembered something,” he replied before pushing open the door to the breakroom. Phil and Techno looked at him with surprise (Phil more than Techno) as he announced, “I have something to say! Wilbur, get in here!”

“I’m here, I’m here!” he said as he shuffled into the room.

“Are you okay?” Phil asked, furrowing his eyebrows.

“You know what?” Tommy declared. “I am not fine! I was a good ass employee and you fired me and that was a shitty thing to do!”

The three of them blinked for a moment, taking in Tommy’s words. Phil was the first to collect his thoughts with a remorseful sigh and said, “You’re right. You were great and we fucked it all up.”

“We screwed up,” Techno added.

Phil continued, “Tommy, we’re really s—“

“I’m tired of apologies,” Tommy interrupted. “What are you going to do about the fact that I am jobless and poor? Hm?”

“Weren’t you poor even when you had a job?” Techno raised an eyebrow.

Tommy flipped him off before continuing, “My question still stands! What are you going to do?”

His ex-coworkers exchanged a glance before Phil spoke up, “Would you like to work at the bookstore again?”

“I don’t know,” Tommy shrugged nonchalantly. “I’d like to do a lot of things. I’m a busy man.”

“Stop being a little shit,” Wilbur voiced. “Can you come back and work for us please?”

“I guess if your business is failing without me,” A faint smile pulled at his mouth. “I can spare some time out of my extremely packed schedule...”

“Great! You can sort all of our overstock inventory!” Phil remarked. “Wilbur’s been avoiding it for the past month.”

Tommy’s smile dropped. “Wait, I don’t want to—”

“Phil, you can’t make him do inventory,” Techno interjected, flatly.

“Thank you, Techno,” Tommy nodded. “It’s nice to know someone values my skills—”

“He can’t read,” Techno finished.

“What the hell!?”

His newly reappointed coworkers laughed as Tommy crossed his arms with a huff. “You’re going to regret this. I’ll just make all your pens stick to the ceiling.”

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. “Wait– Was that you?!”

Shit. Tommy chuckled nervously, “Um... I have no idea what you’re talking about...”

“I fell off my fucking desk trying to get those pens down!”

Tommy started to step through the doorframe and into the hallway. “Oh my Prime, look at the time! Tubbo and Ranboo are probably wondering where I am! I’m just going to head out now!”

“You’re a fucking gremlin!” Wilbur yelled as Tommy raced down the hallway with a smile plastered on his face. He didn’t even notice that his headache had faded away.

Tommy kicked open the door and shouted, “I am no longer unemployed, bitches!”

“Oh hey, Tommy!” Tubbo exclaimed. He was sitting next to Ranboo on the bed. The machines in the room were no longer blinking and beeping and Tubbo looked like he had recently exited a shower.

“Congratulations?” Ranboo said with a confused smile.

“Yeah, suck it Ranboo!” Tommy gloated. “You’re the only poor and jobless person here now!”

“Why are you making fun of me?” Ranboo questioned.

Tubbo then pointed out, “Just because you have a job doesn’t mean you’re rich. You spent all your savings on Animal Crossing Amiibos.”

“Boo! You guys are just mad that I’m going to be super rich.”

Tubbo raised an eyebrow. “I’m assuming you got rehired at the bookstore.”

Tommy pulled up a chair and sat across from his roommates. “They were basically begging me to come back. Wilbur cried.”

“Oh that makes sense,” Tubbo nodded. “You cried until they rehired you.”

“I never said that!”

“Yeah, but we know what you meant,” Tubbo smirked as Ranboo stifled a laugh.

“At least I have a job, unlike some people,” Tommy shot a glare at Ranboo.

Tubbo frowned, “What happened with being a sidekick?”

Tommy and Ranboo shared a look and Tubbo groaned, “Please do not tell me you dropped a building on Dream.”

“He’s the one that dropped the building on me!” Tommy exclaimed.

“Why the hell was Dream dropping a building on you?”

“It wasn’t on purpose,” Ranboo replied. “He was aiming for Wilbur.”

Tubbo blinked. “So what does that have to do with Ranboo getting fired though?”

“Oh that has nothing to do with that,” Tommy noted. “Ranboo just got fired because Dream is a dick.”

“And then stole my powers,” Ranboo added with a shrug. Realization suddenly passed over his face and Ranboo quickly stuttered, “Wait– I– I didn’t mean to–”

Tubbo turned to him with wide eyes. “Dream can do *what* ?”

But Tommy just shrugged. “I could give two shits about what the Egg knows about that asswipe.”

However, before Ranboo could answer, a soft knock sounded and the three roommates turned their attention to the door.

It clicked open and Techno gently pushed the door open. He walked into the room with a sandwich on a small paper plate.

“Hi,” Techno greeted with a monotone voice.

Ranboo and Tubbo glanced at Tommy with confusion, but Tommy just mirrored their expressions. Their voices overlapped as they all then replied, “Hi.”

“Ranboo mentioned that you didn’t like the soup,” Techno continued, turning to Tommy. He lifted the plate toward the teenager. “Here you go.”

“It’s alright. I’m not that hungry,” Tommy awkwardly smiled. After his newly goop-repaired stomach had barely accepted the soup, he wasn’t sure what food he could keep down.

“Oh, okay,” Techno lowered the plate and started to turn away.

A pang of guilt hummed in his chest. Fuck. Techno wasn’t just randomly giving Tommy a sandwich. He doing something *nice* .

“Wait!” Tommy held out his hand. “I can just keep the sandwich until I get hungry!”

Techno turned back with a look of surprise (as much as Techno could look surprised). “Okay, up to you.”

His pink-haired coworker then handed him the plate. The sandwich just had some vegetables and lunch meat. It was simple. Just like the man who made it.

“Thanks,” Tommy placed it on the side table next to him.

“No problem.”

The room was slowly filled with silence again. Techno awkwardly shifted near the door as the roommates exchanged another confused look.

“Uh,” Tommy raised his eyebrow. “Did you need something else?”

“Yeah,” Techno said, keeping his eyes on the ground. “But it’s kind of hard to explain.”

“We can leave you alone if you want,” Tubbo said and Ranboo nodded.

“No, no. It’s okay. It’s not that serious,” Techno assured.

“What’s up, bossman?” Tommy tilted his head.

Techno's face was emotionless, but he avoided eye contact as he knitted his fingers together. "So you know how I told you about the Voices in my head? Like the catalyst of my powers?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, recently they kind of have been pestering me to say sorry..."

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows. "I already told you I'm tired of—"

Techno raised his head with an earnest look, "No, Tommy. *They* want to apologize. The Voices."

Tommy blinked. Maybe he was wrong about Techno being a simple man. He replied, "I'm really confused now. I thought your voices just told you when people were going to attack you or made you angry?"

"I knew this would happen," The swordsman muttered as he rubbed his temples. "Yeah, the Voices do those things, but they also kind of have feelings and opinions. And after the... incident, they felt really really bad. So they wanted to say sorry."

"Uh, okay? I'm not really sure how to reply to that."

"They want you to accept their apology," Techno squeezed his eyes shut for a second, before continuing, "*Please* just accept their apology."

Tommy crossed his arms as a smirk formed on his face while he continued, "I don't know... I'm still a bit sad..."

"Don't do this—" Techno paused before letting out a deep sigh. "And now they are crying."

"How are they crying?" Ranboo wondered aloud. "Aren't they just voices?"

"Trust me. They've found a way," Techno explained tiredly. "They've only done this twice before. First with Wilbur and then with Phil. I didn't expect them to do it again since I don't really talk to many people, let alone have friends for them to cry over... but I guess they ended up getting attached again."

Tommy's smirk grew. "Aw, Techno, are you admitting to being friends with me?"

"If I say we are friends, will you accept their apology? They're just going to keep whining if you don't." Tommy nodded his head in confirmation and Techno rolled his eyes before continuing, "I am admitting to being friends with Tommy Innit."

"I'm going to rub this in Wilbur's face," Tommy bragged. "Alright! I forgive the... um... Voices?"

"Voices is fine."

"I forgive you, Voices! Now stop crying in Techno's head please."

“Thank you,” Techno breathed. It seemed like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

However, now that Tommy knew Techno’s voices liked him, his curiosity was hitting its peak. “What are they saying now?”

“They are calling each other cringe for crying,” Techno deadpanned before putting his hand on the doorknob. “Well, sorry for disturbing you. I’ll probably be in the breakroom if you need anything else.”

“Thanks for the sandwich, Techno,” Tommy smiled.

“No problem— ugh,” Techno interrupted himself with a groan. He turned back around, facing Ranboo and Tubbo. “I have been instructed to let the sidekick and the friend know that the Voices also like them.”

Tubbo pumped his fist and exclaimed, “Hell yeah!”

On the other hand, Ranboo stuttered with a red face, “Oh! Um— Thank— Thanks—However, I’m not technically a sidekick anymore—”

“Who cares about them? The Voices like me more than Wilbur, right?!” Tommy interjected. “Right?!”

“I am not dealing with this,” Techno mumbled as the door closed behind him.

A few beats of silence passed. There was no heat behind his chest. There was no ache plaguing his mind. There was no splintering ship. For the first time in a long time, Tommy felt... normal.

Maybe if he looked in the mirror, he might actually recognize the person looking back at him this time. Maybe he had more control over his destiny than he thought. Maybe.

Then Tubbo stated, “I think the Voices might like Wilbur more than you.”

“Oh fuck you!”

Chapter End Notes

thanks for sticking with me through the hurt :I hope you enjoyed the comfort <3

If you're ever curious about updates while I write please think about joining the discord!
I sometimes give small updates in there! :)

Here are all the links to my various social medias!

[The Untitled Discord](#)

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitter](#)

[My TikTok](#)

Rule #22: You Have to Crack a Few Eggs to make an Omelette

Chapter Notes

Hi heres a chapter i didn't take a break idk what ur talking about ha ha ha ha :)

tw / descriptions of pain? idk lmk if I need to add more

also ignore the grammar and spelling mistakes plz my brain is mush :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A frigid breeze whipped through his hair as Tommy adjusted his new mask. He was unsure how Quackity created a mask so similar to the original, but alas he wasn't complaining. His hands stung from the cold air and stuck them in the pocket of his hoodie, another replacement courtesy of the casino owner.

It felt like a lifetime since he last stood in front of this warehouse. A shiver ran down his spine as he fought the gross feeling of deja vu. He couldn't tell if the wind was making the empty construction sites in the distance creak and moan louder or if his mind was playing tricks on him. It was clear that his body did not enjoy running on 30 minutes of sleep and two protein bars.

He let out a sigh, his breath crystallizing into a mist. As it dissipated, it was replaced by flurries. Tommy glanced up at the cloudy sky to see snowflakes gently making their way down to Earth. They quickly began to fill the air, clinging to his suit for no more than a second, before melting away. He wondered if it was this simple for spores to spread. But the spores wouldn't just melt away; *they would stick and seep into the lungs and head directly for the brain, infecting every single thought. This was about to happen to thousands of people in the city in just a few hours. People would lose all sense of themselves because of something he had done. He had done this. And if he didn't fix it then people would get hurt. They would all get hurt if-*

A soft bump interrupted his spiraling as Wilbur said, "It's snowing."

"No way," Tommy deadpanned. "I guess you're not just a master at hearing, but also seeing!"

Wilbur rolled his eyes. "You're just mad because I'm competent at using basic observational skills."

"Observe deez n--"

"The festival stream is starting," Wilbur cut him off as he turned a phone towards him.

Tommy grumbled as the reporter who filled the screen began, “ *We are so excited to be at this year’s Winter Hero Festival! As you can see behind us the festivities are already in full swing! If you look closely you might even be able to see your favorite heroes!*”

The reporter stepped out of the frame and the camera panned over to various floats and balloons slowly making their way down the street lined with cheering fans, followed by a band playing a variation of hero theme songs. Tommy frowned as they zoomed into a giant balloon of a smiley face mask.

“Didn’t Phil say that they were going to attack right as the festival started? What are they waiting for?” Tommy questioned.

Wilbur pursed his lips into a line. “He did... I’m not sure what’s—”

Suddenly, screams burst through the live stream. The camera shook as the reporter's voice came through again, “*Sorry for the interruption, but it seems like there may be a short disruption— oh no!*”

RIIIIPPP

The camera focused on the smile balloon as it was sliced in half by a dark figure. Then a blur flew by, resulting in the reporter’s hat whipping off their head. People ran away from the street in hordes as the deflating Number One Hero balloon slowly descended to the ground. Tommy noticed purple particles mixed in with the snow flurries near the crowd as the reporter began to describe the scene to the best of their ability. However, Wilbur clicked off the stream before Tommy could discern their words.

“I guess they were waiting for a particularly ugly balloon to show up,” Wilbur shrugged before touching the lock on the nearest door and breaking it. Then he unclipped two gas masks from his belt and handed one to Tommy before slipping on his own.

Tommy followed suit and covered his face. And even though his stomach was doing back-flips, a smile pulled at his mouth, “They chose a good one to start with.”

—

Another wave of familiarity swallowed Tommy as they jogged through the dimly lit hallway. His eyes strained as they adjusted to the orange light and his heart jumped into his throat as he recognized the endless doors lining their path.

Wilbur brushed his fingers against the walls as he mumbled, “I didn’t think they were serious.”

“Who was serious?” Tommy raised an eyebrow.

Surprise passed through Wilbur's face as if he didn’t expect Tommy to respond. “Oh, I just remembered something they taught at the Academy.”

“Was it that they hid the fact that there was a prison under the city?”

Nodding, Wilbur ran his hand through his hair. “They said it was for the protection of the public. How is abandoning a prison complex underneath civilian’s feet protecting anyone?”

“What a bunch of asswipes,” Tommy muttered. “You’re lucky you got out when you were able to.”

Wilbur let out a strained laugh, “Yeah, something like that...”

“To be honest, I didn’t even know that quitting the hero program was an option. How’d they let two kids with powers like yours and Techno’s just leave?”

Wilbur’s eyes avoided Tommy’s. “Let’s just say, they couldn’t argue with kids with powers like ours.”

Tommy hummed in understanding. A quiet fell between them and only their footsteps echoed through the empty corridors, reverberating the memory of when he was here last. Luckily though, this time his head was free from any pounding. His anxiety and the stale air were making his teeth chatter, but he was relieved to know that the mask was working.

He glanced over to Wilbur who was still dragging his hand on the wall as they made a few turns. He had assured Tommy that he would be able to guide them to the chamber. But honestly, after that, the plan was shit. Once they got to the chamber, Tommy was just supposed to ‘send the Egg back to its dimension’ like it was something he did as a hobby.

He clenched his jaw to keep from shivering. What the fuck was he doing? Why the hell did he think he could fix this? He had no idea what he was doing and now he had dragged Wilbur into a fucking prison with a mind-controlling Egg who wanted to possess them. Tommy’s breath caught in his throat.

What if something happened to Wilbur’s mask and the Egg targeted him? He couldn’t imagine how Wilbur would feel under the effect of the Egg with his amplified senses. How long would he be able to resist it before the Egg would force him to attack Tommy? His lungs tightened.

Tommy couldn’t fight Wilbur. ~~The walls were closing in on him.~~ It wasn’t even the fact that Tommy didn’t want to hurt Wilbur. The reality was that the last time Tommy fought Wilbur, he lost. ~~The pressure was pulling down on him. The ceiling was collapsing in on him.~~

If Wilbur beat him, then it wouldn’t just be Tommy losing this time. ~~They would all lose. Tommy would fail everyone. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t breathe.~~

~~Why couldn’t he couldn’t breathe? All his efforts would be useless. All of this was useless. He was going to lose. He needed to start over. Start over. Let it all go. Start over. Let it—~~

“Woah, woah, woah,” Wilbur’s voice sounded miles away, “Tommy, what...”

“I– wha– who–” His words sputtered out between his sporadic breaths. There was no pounding, but his whole body was shaking. What was happening to him? Was his mask

broken? Was this the doing of the Egg? Was he infected already? He needed to leave. He needed air. His lungs needed to work. *Why the hell weren't they working—*

Suddenly a warm vibration washed over his body. His lungs immediately followed the waves of hum that calmed his thoughts. Air flooded his lungs and the fog plaguing his mind lifted as Tommy's eyes landed on the hand on his chest.

Instinctively, Tommy placed his hand on the source of the soft drone.

"Fuck," Wilbur said as he quickly pulled his hand away. "I am so sorry. You weren't responding and I—"

"It's okay," He kept his hand on his chest for a moment. His heart continued to follow the pulse that Wilbur had set for him. Then he met Wilbur's eyes. "Thank you."

Wilbur nodded before asking, "Are you alright? Your breathing spiked out of nowhere."

Tommy shrugged as he straightened up. "Is my mask broken? Maybe the Egg is fucking with me again?"

Wilbur glanced at Tommy's mask but then shook his head. "Your mask is fine. Does this happen often? Where you can't control your breathing?"

He shrugged again. "I don't know. It only happened when I'm stressed, I guess."

"You have panic attacks when you're stressed and you *chose* to be a vigilante?" Wilbur questioned in disbelief.

"Hey! It only got stressful when *you* got involved!" Tommy shot back as they turned a corner. "According to that, you're the cause of all my problems!"

"You're blaming me for the things neither of us can control?"

"I can blame you for whatever I want because you are old and mean."

"At least I'm not a child with no critical thinking skills."

"I am not a child! And I have many thinking skills! I think a lot! Some would say too much! Like why is Colonel spelled so differently from how it's pronounced? Who the fuck decided to do that?"

Wilbur shook his head disappointingly before replying, "As much as I enjoy you yelling about the English language, you're going to have to shut up. We're about to get to the chamber."

"I meant to ask, how did you even figure out where it was? This place is a fucking maze."

"I've been listening for the place with the most concentrated level of heartbeats. Notice how we didn't bump into a single guard while making it here?"

Realization clicked in Tommy's mind. Fuck. He had been so busy worrying about other things—aka their shit plan—to notice the lack of Egg cultists. Tommy swiveled his head around as he spoke in a harsh whisper, "Shit! Are they close by?"

"Nah. I'm guessing that most of them are at the festival and the ones left are protecting the Egg," Wilbur answered as they turned a corner.

They both stopped as they came face to face with a set of iron double doors at the end of the hallway. A shiver of *deja vu* crawled down Tommy's spine.

Tommy gulped before saying, "How many people are in there?"

More like how many people do we have to fight? he thought.

"I hear 7 heartbeats," Wilbur stated. He then turned towards Tommy. "But all you need to focus on is getting to the Egg. I will handle the guards."

"But—"

"I will handle them," Wilbur repeated. He then glanced at his wrist communicator, the green crystal embedded into the strap glinted in the warm light. "I have no updates from Phil. I'm assuming they're still stalling, but we don't know how much time we have. So you focus on your job, okay?"

"7 people is a lot of people. What if you need help—"

Wilbur shook his head, interrupting him. "You have to promise me that you will focus on your job. Just send the Egg back. That's all you need to do."

Tommy's stomach twisted in on itself. He dropped his head down. "Wilbur, I don't even know if this will work."

"It's going to work," Wilbur replied without hesitation. "It's going to work because you're going to promise me that you will finish your job." Wilbur placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder. His goggles and mask made it difficult to see Wilbur's features, but behind the red lenses, Tommy met his eyes. A warmth bloomed in his chest. Wilbur continued, "Right?"

Tommy let out a sigh. Wilbur was right. He brought this dumb plant into this world. It was his responsibility to finish this job. "I promise."

Wilbur turned towards the doors as he started to roll out his shoulder and said, "I guess it's time to make a giant omelet."

Tommy lowered himself into a running stance as he scoffed, "Boo, bad joke."

"That means nothing coming from you. You find *deez nuts* jokes funny."

"You know what's actually coming? *Deez nu—*"

SNAP

Tommy's hilarious joke was cut off by a wave of vibrations blasting through the metal doors. They slammed open and the two of them sprinted into the room, ready to face off a wave of attacks.

However, Tommy stumbled forward. He cursed as he fell into a roll. He then winced, waiting for the swarm of hits to berate him because of his mistake.

But nothing happened.

He swiveled his head around, taking in the giant chamber. Familiar red vines were draped from the sky-high ceiling and red haze illuminated the cavern. The giant Egg loomed over them a few yards away from where Tommy fell, looking no different from before.

However, there was one main different change. There were a bunch of bodies sprawled out all around the room.

"What the hell?" Tommy voiced, turning to see that he had tripped over a person.

"They're all alive, just unconscious," Wilbur stated, resolving the concern in Tommy's mind. "But who—"

"Took you long enough," A voice far too familiar echoed loudly. "I was starting to doubt if you were going to show up, Tommy."

A cold sweat drenched his body as he twisted toward the direction of the voice.

Dream.

"What..." Tommy's voice was barely audible. Fear coursed through his veins as his pulse roared in his ears. His brain was screaming to move, to run away as fast as possible, but he was frozen. His mind was going so fast that darkness rimmed his eyesight.

Suddenly, Wilbur appeared in front of Tommy, putting himself between the vigilante and the hero.

"Take a step closer, I will make sure you never walk again," Wilbur threatened, the anger radiating off of him.

Dream put his hands up in defense. "Woah! I am here to help! Look around you! I took care of all these guys for you!"

"Why the fuck would we need your help?"

"I have no desire to help you, Wilbur. I am only here to help Tommy solve this little problem." The smile on the mask stared at Tommy, making him want to curl in on himself. Dream continued, a sickly sweet tone entering his voice, "What do you think, Tommy?"

A wave of nausea washed over Tommy as he resisted the urge to reply to the hero.

"Don't speak to him," Wilbur cut in, his knuckles were turning white

The hero let out a humorless laugh, “Are you seriously going to let this villain speak for you? *I can help.* You and I both know that.”

Dream’s words twisted Tommy’s insides. As much as he wanted to scream, wishing to never see that haunting smile ever again, the little logic left in him hummed in the back of his skull. The reality was that he didn’t have time to reject help. Especially the help of the person who had watched him open a portal to another dimension.

“He doesn’t need shit from you piece of—” Wilbur started, but was interrupted.

“Wilbur,” Tommy called out. The criminal turned towards the vigilante as he shakily got his feet. Wilbur stuck out his hand, but Tommy shook his head before continuing quietly, “You trust me, right?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Okay...” Tommy gulped, trying to embed false confidence into his words. “Then let me do this.”

Wilbur stared at him for a moment, his expression unreadable behind his goggles and mask. He then nodded before stepping aside, allowing Tommy to face-to-face with the hero.

The hero immediately spoke up, continuing with the teeth-rotting tone, “I’m glad you’re able to see that I can help—”

“You were there, weren’t you?” Tommy interrupted flatly. He focused on keeping his legs from shaking. He wouldn’t give Dream the satisfaction. “You saw me open the portal that brought this thing here.”

A few beats of silence passed before Dream let out a sigh and answered, “If you want to get straight to the point, yes. I was there.”

A bit of relief lifted from his shoulders. They weren’t just dreams. He wasn’t crazy. He had actually opened a portal. Tommy pushed on, “So you know how I did it, don’t you? The steps I did to get it open?”

Dream tilted his head, “You want to open another gate, but you don’t even know how to do it?”

“I have no choice,” he said, anger simmering in the back of his throat. “I have to try.”

“And what are you going to do if it doesn’t work? Have you thought this through?”

“You know what?” Tommy’s voice began to rise. “I don’t fucking care! For one fucking second I thought you maybe actually gave a shit about anything besides yourself! I’m going to get rid of this Egg by *any means necessary.*”

Then he turned around and made his way to the Egg. Approaching it, he noticed a red glow radiating off the plant. It was like it was breathing. Honestly, it probably *was* breathing.

Tommy took a deep breath in and slowly let out, feeling the hot air stay within the mask and warm his cheeks. He raised his hands and widened his stance. He searched for a feeling that felt familiar. Each muscle in his body began to tense under his powers, pulling down something—anything. He needed to do this. He needed to be strong. A burning sensation spread across his back. Something felt wrong. But that didn't matter. Sweat tickled the sides of his head. He just needed to push. He needed to keep going. Pressure squeezed his lungs. He could do this. He could break through. *Why the fuck couldn't he—*

CRACK

Tommy fell to his knees, shattered concrete all around him. Suddenly, a loud groan echoed throughout the cavern. His eyes snapped up as a giant vine headed straight for his head. His brain screamed for him to move, but his muscles were still grounded by his powers.

But then,

His body slammed to the side just as a vine smashed into the floor where he had just been seconds ago. The room shook for a moment before going still again. Blood pounded in his ears and his chest heaved up and down as his eyes came back into focus and saw Wilbur above him.

“Are you okay?” Wilbur asked breathlessly.

Tommy nodded before furrowing his eyebrows. “What the hell happened though? Is someone attacking us?”

As they both sat up, Wilbur glanced around. “It doesn't seem like it. Maybe the Egg doesn't want you to send it back?”

Before Tommy could reply, Dream spoke out, “The Egg can't do shit without its minions. That was all Tommy.”

Tommy shot a glare at the hero as he retorted, “What? How the fuck was that my fault?!”

“You were focusing all your power on yourself and the area around you. Look,” Dream gestured to something behind them.

Tommy frowned as he turned around. His frown deepened as he saw giant cracks stretching along the cavern walls, disappearing into a vine-covered roof.

“If you keep doing what you're doing, you're going to bring this whole place down,” Dream went on.

The hero's smile felt like nails being drilled into his brain. A sharp pain came from his tongue and the taste of metal filled his mouth.

What the fuck was he even doing? Why couldn't anything just come easily for him? Why did he always have to work so hard for nothing to come from his actions? And why the fuck did Dream always have to watch him fail? Tommy pushed himself to his feet, irritation heating his face.

“What the fuck do you want me to do instead!? Do you want me to admit I have no idea what the fuck I’m doing? Fine! *I have no idea what the fuck I’m doing!*” Tommy ripped off his mask, staring at the hollow eyes of the Number One Hero’s smile, “I *know* I can open this thing! My mind *knows* that I’ve done this! But it’s like my body resists everything I tell it to do! *Why the hell can’t I just remember how the fuck I did it?!*”

Tommy’s voice bounced off the walls, echoing throughout the cavern. He moved his eyes to the ground, shame seeping into his shoulders. He didn’t have time to give up. The city was counting on him. His friends were counting on him. Everyone was counting on him.

Yet here he was.

He then felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned his head to Wilbur beside him. The criminal’s eyes were gentle. But before he could speak, Dream’s voice rang out.

“It’s because you can’t remember unless I allow you to.”

His words hung in the air for a moment.

Wait.

What the fuck did he just say?

The cold sweat soaked him as Tommy directed his attention at the hero.

There was no way.

He asked carefully, “What the hell are you talking about?”

Dream let out a long sigh. “You need to understand that whatever I do, it is for the benefit of the city. And that includes you, Tommy.”

Wilbur interjected, “What the fuck does that have to do with what he can remember or not?”

Tommy’s stomach flipped inside out. Dread was drenching his entire body now.

The hero’s voice was calm as spoke, “Tommy can’t remember how to open the gate because I stole his memory of it.”

It was like time slowed down.

All Tommy could hear were Dream’s words reverberating through his skull.

Dream stole his memories. He stole Tommy’s memories. If he stole the memory of opening the gate, what else did he steal? But that’s not possible. Dream can’t do that. His power was copying. Dream can’t do that. Maybe he stole Ranboo’s powers one time, but that doesn’t mean he can do that. Dream cannot do that. Dream cannot do that. Heroes don’t steal memories. It doesn’t make sense. Why was Dream saying this? He was lying. He had to be lying. Dream cannot—

A calm hum vibrated on his wrist, snapping him back to reality. Wilbur's voice immediately filled the room. "What the fuck do you mean you *stole his memories*?!"

"What does it sound like? I took his memories of the incident and now he doesn't have them! That's it!" Dream spat back.

"But... your powers are to copy..." Tommy's voice was small. His brain was still barely processing the scene in front of him. "How can you... why did you..."

Dream hadn't just made 6 months of his life hell. Dream had twisted his memory of it. Dream had fucking manipulated his brain. Dream took away his memories— *took away a part of him* —because he thought it was for '*the greater good*.'

This entire time he had been fighting with himself, constantly at war with his thoughts, confused about what was good and what was evil. And in the end, he just blamed himself. He blamed his own mind for being broken.

He wrenched his wrist away from the calm hum as a spark of rage lit behind his chest.

The hero shook his head. "You became too powerful. You were never meant to remember that you could do it. The fact that the memory resurfaced is something—"

The fury washed over Tommy's whole body. The back of his throat burned. He dug his nails into his palms to keep from shaking.

Dream was the worst fucking boss ever.

"Give them back," his voice was dark.

"Tommy, you don't understand—"

"Did I fucking stutter?" Tommy took a step forward, barely containing the urge to leap forward and send the hero to the center of the Earth. "*Give. Them. Back.*"

Dream paused. He then crossed his arms and asked, "And what are you going to do if I don't?"

Tommy's thoughts were spiraling a thousand miles a second. Even though he could barely hear himself with the blood roaring against his eardrums, Tommy growled, "You're so scared of the powers I could have, you forget that I can still bring this whole fucking place down with *both us in it*. I will make sure neither of us will ever see the fucking sun again. *That is a fucking promise.*"

An excruciating painful silence hung in the air.

The tension weighed down on Tommy's lungs.

The hollow eyes of the mask bore deep into his eyes.

The unreadable smile mocked Tommy's existence.

He didn't even know the face of the man who ruined his mind—*his life*.

But then,

Dream threw his hands up in defeat as he said, “There’s no use arguing with you when you’re like this. You can have them back.”

Tommy felt his brain short circuit for a moment. The anger switched to confusion. He raised an eyebrow, “Are you fucking with me?”

“Why would I do that?” Dream crossed his arms. “I don’t have time to fight a teenage vigilante with explosive emotions. And honestly, I don’t think you have the time either. Don’t you have a gate to open?”

Realization slapped Tommy across the face. He spun towards Wilbur as he said, “Fuck! How much time do we have?!”

Looking at his communicator, Wilbur replied, “Well, I haven’t gotten an update yet, but my connection here is unclear, so I’m not—”

“Despite the performance by your friends, the festival has simply been postponed to later today,” Dream interrupted. “Whatever you want to do with the Egg, you have to do it now.”

Wilbur cursed under his breath as Tommy ordered, “So what the fuck are you waiting for? Give me back my memories so I can send this evil piece of shit plant back to whatever hellhole it came from!”

“I would, but your friend here threatened to break my legs if I came close to you,” Dream stated matter-of-factly, making Tommy’s skin crawl. What an asswipe.

Tommy shot Wilbur a look and the two locked eyes. Wilbur let out a sigh before he said, “Do what you need to do. But make one wrong move and I won’t hesitate to make your ears bleed.”

“You know, Wilbur,” Dream replied as he gestured for them all to come closer to the Egg, “I would feel threatened, but then again, I also know that you don’t have the backbone to follow through.”

“I’ll show you a backbone when I rip your spine out—”

Tommy put his hand up, stopping his friend. “Dream, just get on with it.”

The hero walked up right behind him. Tommy kept his eyes forward, focusing on the bright red plant in front of him. He couldn’t tell if the shivers scaling his back were from the alien mind-controlling plant or the feel of the eyes of his former boss on his back. Then Dream placed his hands on Tommy’s shoulders. He resisted to urge to recoil at the touch but froze as Dream leaned forward.

The hero whispered in his ear, “I am not scared of you, with or without your memories. I took them for your own good. One day you’ll understand that I am the only one that can keep you

under control.”

“You can’t—” Tommy was cut off by a wave of nausea.

Dark spots covered his vision as a ringing filled his ears. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to keep his head from spinning. However, he then fell to one knee as he gripped his head like it was going to help get his thoughts from rattling around his skull.

But then all at once,

like a curtain had been lifted from his mind,

it made sense.

He hadn’t even realized he was in a haze this entire time.

He remembered all of it. Just like if it had happened yesterday.

The endless experiments. The sleepless nights. The aching joints. The freezing laboratories. The failed attempts.

And the successful attempt.

A chill ran down his spine. ~~The one where he was the strongest.~~

Or was it?

A memory surfaced at the front of his thoughts.

“Tommy!” 404, the number 2 hero of L’Manburg, screamed over the sound. “You need to close—”

Suddenly, a bright white light shot out of the sliver and hit the hero.

Then a flash enveloped the room.

“Fuck,” Tommy cursed under his breath. He wasn’t just Dream’s assistant for those 6 months. He really was helping Dream open the gate. The memories continued to slowly rise as if finally brain was working to its full capacity.

His body jolted in surprise as someone touched his shoulder.

“Sorry! Sorry!” He twisted to see Wilbur crouching beside him. The criminal continued, worry-soaking his words, “Are you okay?”

Tommy nodded. “I remember how to do it.”

Wilbur’s eyes lit up. “Really?”

“Yeah...” Tommy then glanced at Dream who was standing off to the side. “I remember everything.”

The hero didn't acknowledge the comment as Tommy gripped Wilbur's shoulder and stood again. Wilbur asked, "Do you think you'll be able to replicate it?"

"I think I can. If I just do exactly what I did last time then I should be able to," Tommy explained. He was still sifting through his memories, but his body naturally began to slip off his shoes.

He bent down to take off his socks as Wilbur wondered out loud, "Uh... what are you doing?"

Tommy raised his head with wide eyes. He sheepishly answered, "Oh I need to take off my socks. It's like a part of the process."

"He needs to ground himself," Dream chimed in.

Tommy frowned as he agreed, "I think has to do with my powers too. However, I don't think we ever figured out how I'm able to do this..." He trailed off, racking his mind for a moment where Dream cared if the experiments were destroying his body or not.

He came up empty. Tommy wasn't surprised. He never was when it came to Dream's actions.

"Well, after this, you never have to open another portal ever again," Wilbur reassured him. "Just one more time. Right?"

"Right..." Tommy shot another look at the hero. He hated the way that his mind naturally gravitated toward the hero. Not to mention, the influx of memories where his past self was enamored by his former boss was not helping. He flexed his fists open and closed before letting out a long breath. "Okay, I think I'm ready."

Tommy raised his hands out towards the plant and closed his eyes. Then he slightly shifted his feet, allowing the little warmth he had left to abandon the soles of his feet. The coldness slowly crawled up his legs. He was okay. The numbness filled his torso and his chest. He clenched his jaw closed to keep his teeth from chattering. This was right. This felt like the last time. The coldness now inched along his outstretched arms. He was almost there. He was strong. The icy sensation finally touched his fingertips.

Now. ***Let it out.***

He pulled against every crack, every space, every attraction between particles. He could do this. He needed to do this. He clawed into the air with everything he had, his body burning as his arms tried to rip apart every force known to mankind. ***He had to fix his mess. This way he could start all over again. He wanted to start over.***

A scream ripped out of his throat.

Energy struck him in the face. A white light glowed beyond his closed eyes. He could feel the fibers of his muscles screaming as they fought against the invisible forces he was holding open.

Just beyond his pulse roaring in his ears, Dream shouted, “Wilbur! Help me push this thing in!”

Tommy ground his teeth together, focusing all his power on his icy fingertips, keeping the gate open. Sweat drenched his face and crawled down his back. The pain surpassed anything he had ever felt before. Every fiber in his body felt as if it was being torn apart molecule by molecule

However, only one thing echoed in his head.

“It’s going to work,” Wilbur replied without hesitation. “It going to work because you’re going to promise me that you will finish your job.”

All he had to do was finish his job.

Then it would be over.

His friends would be safe.

He would be safe.

He would never feel pain ever again.

No more pain

No more pain.

No pain.

Just strong.

He would be strong.

He could let it all go.

He would never hold back again.

He was going to start everything o—

“TOMMY!” Dream screamed in his ear,

Tommy snapped his eyes open. Pure energy tore at his face, making it sting. Where the Egg was just moments ago was now a giant pulsating abyss of light.

He had done it. He had opened a gate.

A smile crawled across his face. There was no longer denying it.

Tommy was strong.

He was powerful.

“Tommy!” He twisted his head to see Dream a few feet away, struggling to stand against the gravity of the gate. “Close it!”

He looked back at his creation. With each passing second, Tommy could feel himself gain more and more control of the neverending light in front of him. The beams had begun to embed within his arms, flowing into his veins. Warmth traveled along his limbs and reached right behind his ribcage, twisting around his heart. He had never felt this way before.

All along he had people constantly beat him down. Constantly they would tell him that he was never good enough. That he was replaceable. That he was a mistake.

That he was weak.

And he would never let anyone tell him he was weak again.

He turned back to Dream with a smile wider than the one on the hero’s mask.

Tommy was strong. He was strong enough to fix this world.

And this was how he was going to do it.

“No.”

Tommy’s words floated perfectly with the crackling of light radiating off of the growing abyss.

A symphony of power.

“Close it! That is an order!” Dream attempted to lunge at him, but failed and fell to his knees.

“You wanted me to be strong, Dream!” Tommy shouted out, “This is what you wanted! I’m going to fix everything! I can do anything!”

A crazed laugh escaped his lips as the radiance soaked into his bloodstream. This was the greatest Tommy had ever felt! He was the greatest! ***He could do whatever he wanted! Once he fixed this world then he would never feel pain again! All he would feel was strong! He was going to be the strongest anyone has ever—***

A soft hum cut through the harsh burn.

“Hey Tommy,” a soft voice vibrated through his mind.

His smile dropped.

His friend’s face was beside him. No mask, no goggles, just the face of the man who would use chalk until it was the tiniest nib as he passionately explained the meaning of a sonnet before playfully throwing it at his students.

The face of the man who would softly strum simple melodies on his guitar in the last hour before the bookstore closed.

The face of the man who gave him extra time on his analytical essay about the man who had sex with his mom.

The face was Wilbur's.

Wilbur was here.

Suddenly, the warmth became ice.

"Wil-Wilbur-I- can't-" Tommy sputtered out, he was frozen as his muscles screamed in pain. The cold was burning him from the inside out.

He glanced at the abyss. It was growing bigger and bigger by the second. His heart jumped into his throat. This was no longer just a gate to another dimension.

He had ripped a hole in space and time.

And it was going to rip Tommy apart along with the rest of the world.

His friend gripped his arm, allowing the hum to travel across the left of Tommy's body, but it wasn't enough. Tommy still could feel each of his molecules being severed.

Wilbur went on, "You're all done, Tommy. You finished the job. You can close the portal now."

Tears blurred his vision as Tommy held back a sob. "I- don't-I don't think I-"

"You made a promise, right? All you have to do is focus on finishing the job."

"It- It hurts so b-bad-" He couldn't hold on anymore. The glowing abyss was going to swallow him whole.

"I know, I know it hurts, but you need to close it. Then you'll get to see Tubbo and Ranboo. You can go see the stars with them. Remember?"

Tubbo. Ranboo.

Wilbur pushed on, "You also need to come back to the bookstore. We need you there. Phil, Techno, and I need *you* there."

Phil. Techno.

"Tommy, please," Wilbur's voice wavered. "You promised."

The words reverberated throughout him and the memories rose to the surface.

"I'm not obsessed with them! I only memorize the heartbeats of people that I care about, you little prick," Wilbur replied.

“Let him do it,” Techno repeated. “If he believes that he can send it back, then I believe him too.”

“It’s not a problem. If you ever need anything, please don’t hesitate to ask. Balancing school and work can be difficult. You should have seen Wilbur and Techno when they were in school, damn, they were complete messes,” Phil replied.

“You’re right.” Ranboo stated, “They don’t. But you matter. You deserve respect.”

Tubbo wiped the tears that had started to run down his face. “Y-You’ve never been a mistake. You’re a g-good person and I don’t care that you do stupid shit, because as long as we’re doing stupid shit together, who c-cares? Y-You’re my best friend. And I need you. I will always need you.”

Tommy had a job to finish.

He had people he cared about.

It didn’t matter if he was strong or not.

All he had to be is strong enough for them.

Tommy gritted his teeth and focused the last of his energy on his hands. He gripped the invisible force, the light growing inch by inch,

and pulled.

He held back a scream as his powers changed their gravitational direction. The chill clawed down his spine. The gate was becoming smaller and smaller. It felt like at any moment his entire body would shatter into a million pieces.

But it didn’t matter. He had a job to finish.

He just had to keep going for one more second.

He was going to close this gate.

One more second.

He was going to re-shelve the books.

One more second.

He was going to see the stars.

One more second.

He was going to complete his promise.

With one final burst of energy, Tommy pulled the edges of the gate together.

A burst of light exploded through the cavern. Tommy flew back, slamming into the ground.

And then it was dark.

Tommy blinked, trying to get his eyes to adjust to the low lights of the cavern. His heart sped up. He couldn't see Wilbur anymore. He tried to get up, but his limbs were jello. The numbness quickly turned into a pulsating full-body ache. He fell to the ground, unable to move.

He needed to know if Wilbur was okay. *What if he was hurt? Tommy couldn't even move. He wouldn't be able to help him. He needed Wilbur. Where was he? Where—*

"Tommy!" Wilbur's voice echoed through the cavern. It took a second for him to identify where the voice was coming from, but then his eyes landed on his friend running up to him.

Besides a few scratches on his face, he was fine. Tommy let out a deep sigh as his pulse returned to a normal rate.

"Oh thank Prime, I'm so—" Wilbur reached out to place his hand on Tommy's arm, but then hesitated. Tommy stared at his hovering hand for a moment. Wilbur started to pull back saying, "I'm glad that you're—"

Tommy cut him off, lunging himself into his friend's arms and gripping the back of his coat. Wilbur was there. And he was fine. He was fine.

It took a moment for Wilbur to process before wrapping his arms around Tommy. Even though the dull ache covered his body, all Tommy cared about was the soft hum that vibrated against his chest.

"You did it. You defeated the Egg," Wilbur croaked out, his voice hoarse.

"We defeated the Egg," Tommy corrected.

Tommy wished he could have stayed in the comfort of the hum for longer, but it was interrupted by someone clearing their throat from across the room.

Tommy frowned as they turned towards Dream who was nonchalantly checking his communicator on the other side of the room.

"Yes, it is very good that you are both fine," Dream flatly stated. "And it seems like your ally worked for once." Dream kicked a vine and it lifelessly rolled away from him.

Tommy glanced around the cavern. The Egg was nowhere to be seen. All the vines and roots that were left behind were devoid of color and had begun to crumble away. His eyes landed on one of the unconscious guards. For a moment Tommy's breath caught in his throat. But all worry faded away as he watched the chest of the man rise and fall. The people who had been possessed were still alive. *Tubbo would still be alive.*

Tommy directed his attention back at the hero and scoffed, "Weird way for you to say 'thank you' for cleaning up *your* mess."

The hero shrugged. “You’re just lucky you were able to get it together this time.”

If Tommy’s body wasn’t jelly he would have punched the hero. “Oh fuck you!”

“Let’s just go, Tommy,” Wilbur suggested, pulling the vigilante up to wobbly legs. Tommy leaned into Wilbur, basically putting his entire body weight on him. “He’s probably called the authorities anyway.”

They began to hobble to the exit when Dream called out, “Hey, Wilbur.”

The two ignored it and continued towards the door, but the hero went on, “You might have been able to stop him this time... but next time, you won’t be able to.”

Tommy tensed up. It was clear who Dream was warning Wilbur about. Then Wilbur whispered, “His words mean nothing. You never have to listen to him again.”

But then the hero spoke again, “Oh yeah, and Tommy...”

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, trying to block out the voice, but it was futile. Dream continued, “When you finally understand why, you know where to find me.”

He pursed his lips together, not sparing the Number One Hero of L’Manburg a second glance, as the door slammed shut behind them.

—

A cold wind hit Tommy’s face as they exited the warehouse. The sky was overcast and flurries were lightly sprinkling creating a white sheet on the world. It was the same world they had left... yet it also wasn’t.

Instead of making Tommy shiver from the inside, the cold was refreshing. The snowflakes clung onto Wilbur’s hair, contrasting against the brown and allowing him to see each variation of the crystals. A yellow brightness came from beyond the clouds, lighting up the world just enough without the harshness of sunbeams.

He let out a visible breath. It was over. It was actually over.

They shuffled behind a shipping crate, getting out of the open as Wilbur stated, “I’m going to set you down, okay?”

Tommy hummed in agreement as Wilbur gently helped him lean against the crate. The feeling had slowly begun to return to his body, but he still couldn’t move on his own.

Wilbur tapped his communicator which let out a beep. Then Wilbur stated, “Shockwave: 10-99. I repeat Shockwave: 10-99. Do you copy?”

Instantly, Phil’s voice came through the radio, “*Wilbur! Are you okay?! Where’s Tommy?!*”

“He’s with me! We are fine!” Wilbur rolled his eyes, “I literally said 10-99.”

"You know Phil didn't learn that crap," Techno's voice crackled out.

"Whatever..." Wilbur continued, "I sent you our location. We need a pickup."

"Is someone hurt?" Phil asked. *"What's going on?"*

"Uh..." Wilbur and Tommy exchanged a glance. Tommy shrugged as Wilbur replied, "It's best if we just explain it to you in person."

"But if you're wondering," Tommy interjected, "that stupid Egg is long fucking gone!"

"Thank Prime," Phil's voice was filled with relief, *"You were silent for so long that we were about to head over there ourselves."*

"I know you're old so it's natural for you to worry, Phil, but this was no problem for a big man like myself!" Tommy answered, attempting to flex his arms but was quickly stopped by his whole body painfully protesting.

"What does old have to do anything with this?" Phil questioned.

"It's not good to worry, Phil. You'll get wrinkles," Techno followed up, his voice emotionless.

"Could we please get back to the topic at hand?" Wilbur cut in, shooting a glare in Tommy's direction. "Is anyone available for a pickup?"

"Yeah, yeah, the sidekick and Phil are heading out now," Techno said.

Ranboo's voice faintly stated, *"I'm not a sidekick anymore—"*

"Over and out," Techno finished and then the communicator beeped again before falling silent.

Wilbur let out a long sigh and slid down the crate next to Tommy as he dragged his hand through his hair, disrupting the snowflakes. He groaned, "I'm ready to sleep for 2 days straight."

"Hey, I'm not stopping you," Tommy replied. "I'm aiming to stay in my bed for the next month."

Wilbur chuckled, "Good plan. Good plan. You deserve it."

"I guess..."

Quiet fell between them as the wind whistled past them. Tommy looked up, watching the clouds slowly make their way across the sky.

He filled his lungs with frigid air and slowly let it out. As his body was covered in a low ache, a nice warmth bloomed behind his chest.

At first, he had been confused by the warmth. The foreign feeling was so different than the grey that he had been drowning in for so long. He had gotten so used to feeling twisted up within his spiraling thoughts. His mind had been fractured for so long that he had forgotten it.

He had forgotten the feeling of peace.

Tommy glanced over at Wilbur. His friend has his eyes closed and was leaning his head back.

And the reality was that the peace had always been there.

However...

Tommy could tell there was just one last thing missing.

“Hey Wilbur.”

“Yeah?” Wilbur opened his eyes.

“Doesn’t it just suck?”

“Huh?” He furrowed his eyebrows.

“Doesn’t *it just suck* ?” Tommy repeated more forcefully.

Wilbur’s confusion instantly turned to annoyance. “No. I am not doing this.”

Tommy sat up with a deep frown, “Just reply! You have to let me have this one! You owe me!”

“How do I owe you anything?! I’m the one that saved your ass!”

“But I saved the world so that counts for more! Plus I died that one time!”

A beat passed before Wilbur rolled his eyes. “You’re a literal child, you know that right?”

“And you’re a balding elderly corpse!” A smirk crawled across Tommy’s face, “Ignoring that, *doesn’t it just suck* ?”

With a pained expression, Wilbur slowly replied, “What sucks?”

This was it.

The final piece.

He had finally done.

He had truly succeeded.

With glory radiating off of him, Tommy answered,

“Suck deez n—”

A flurry of purple particles exploded beside him.

“Hey guys!” Ranboo happily greeted.

“What the hell, Ranboo?!”

“Thank Prime.”

Chapter End Notes

hey y'all! I hope you all are doing well! Lol it's been a hot second since I posted but hey! It's here! Epic final battle! I hope you enjoyed!

The main update I wanted to give you all is that I initially planned two arcs for this story, but I realized that it would be just so much to put into one singular fic (plus my updating schedule isn't the fastest lolol) so next chapter shall be kind of a "season finale wrap up" chapter of sorts lol just so people can read this arc and have an ending!

So don't worry about the few loose ends lol TommyInnit's Declassified Vigilante Survival Guide Vol. 2 shall be coming soon!

And I know I always say this but thank you so much for reading my silly little words it really means the world to me :) I hope you have a wonderful day :)

If you want updates about what's to come I'm always around at these places:

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitch](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

Rule #23: If You're Going to be Late, Bring Donuts

Chapter Notes

so you know how I said that I was going to just have a wrap-up chapter? I lied
Anyways... Here's some pure fluff

Also if you see spelling mistakes please PLEASE just close ur eyes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Aren't you supposed to be at work?”

Gravel crunched under Tommy's feet as he landed in a back alley. He adjusted his phone, fitting it between his head and shoulder so he could continue being reprimanded by his roommate but also leaving his hands free. He grabbed his backpack from behind the dumpster. Then he slipped off his hoodie and his fanny pack and stuffed them into it.

“I'm on my way there right now! I just have to quickly do something before,” Tommy replied, as he started to walk towards the busy street. But he paused and softly cursed before quickly swiping off his mask.

“Oh really? Does it have to do anything with you doing your ‘afterschool hobby’ this morning? Alone? Again?” Tommy could practically hear Tubbo's eyebrow raise up.

“I had to do ‘the afterschool hobby’ today alone anyway! Ranboo is too busy being stressed about the first day at the bookstore!” Tommy said as he pushed into the crowded sidewalk.

Tubbo tried enforcing a patrol schedule for the three of them. He said that it was more efficient to work as a team. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful since Tommy would end up just going out on his own. It wasn't that Tommy didn't enjoy being on a team. He loved going on patrol with his best friends. But lately, his body felt like it was bursting at the seams with energy, especially in the mornings.

So what better way to expel that energy than by punching car thieves and helping old ladies cross the street? And since he was a gentleman, Tommy knew that old ladies were constantly walking around in the morning. Plus Ranboo and Tubbo weren't always available in the morning and he didn't want to disturb them. He was a good roommate like that. Some could even say he was a great roommate! A fantastic roommate! The best roommate to ever exist—

“I get that you're a morning person now, but that doesn't take away the fact that you're shit at time management.”

“What the hell?! That's not true!”

“You are currently late for your job ”

“Phil doesn’t care if I’m late,” Tommy scoffed. He stopped at a crosswalk, watching the red hand glow. The chill breeze brushed past him and ruffled the pages of papers at the newsstand beside him. Tommy frowned as he caught the cover of a magazine.

Exclusive Interview with #1 Hero, Dream: How He Stopped a Deadly Toxin from Destroying the City!

Tommy hadn’t been surprised when Dream came onto the news claiming that he had discovered a ‘toxic plant’ that was killing surrounding wildlife and spreading underneath the city. Tommy had a feeling that the Justice Council and Dream forced the news to speak vaguely about the event, wanting citizens to barely care. It was a success and only after a week, most people had forgotten about the weird interruption at the festival and Dream’s investigation of the city’s vegetation.

Tommy didn’t care that Dream had not even acknowledged his existence in saving the world. Tommy was ready to never think of that asswipe ever again, but Dream just had to prove that he was L’Manburg’s #1 Dick. Not soon after his proclamation that he had saved the city, the news began to remind citizens to report any suspicious activity, especially anyone who was using their powers without a power license.

What a wonderful gift to someone who saved your ass, Tommy thought when he saw the announcement.

Tubbo’s voice continued as the red hand turned into a walking man, “ *You’re really pushing it. Plus, can’t Wilbur fire you too?* ”

Tommy shrugged and started walking again, “It doesn’t matter. If anyone fires me for being late, then I guess I will have to eat all the donuts by myself.”

“Donuts?”

“Yeah, the donuts I’m bringing for Ranboo’s first day, duh.”

“You didn’t tell me you’re going to Niki’s!”

“Well, I *was*. And I was going to be such a wonderful best friend and ask you if you wanted anything too. But then you started to be mean to me so I guess you don’t want anything.”

“Wait, wait, now don’t be rash,” Tubbo backtracked.

“Nuh, uh! You get nothing!”

“You’re just mad because I’m right!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. I’m perfectly punctual all the time... right?”

Tommy smiled as a groan came through the phone. In a monotone voice, Tubbo went on, “*You, Tommy Innit, are punctual .*”

“And...”

“And I’m going to burn all of your Animal Crossing Amiibos if you don’t get me a chocolate frosted donut.”

“What the fuck?! That’s not how this works!”

“Unlike you, I have to get to work on time. Can’t wait until the afternoon! Bye, Tommy!”

“You better not touch anything! I will send you straight into space!”

“And I will send your precious Amiibos straight to hell!” Tubbo said before letting out an evil laugh.

“Tubbo—” But Tommy was cut off by the beeps of the call ending.

It was Tommy’s turn to groan as he headed towards the bakery.

—

“AYUP!” Tommy yelled as he kicked open the door with a box of donuts above his head.

“Prime!” Ranboo yelped in surprise before letting out a sigh of relief. “Oh, it’s just Tommy.”

He was standing at the register next to Techno who flatly stated, “Wilbur’s mad at you.”

“What? But I brought donuts!” Tommy replied.

“Just because Ranboo’s here doesn’t mean you can be tardy,” Wilbur said, coming up from behind a bookcase with an irritated expression. But then again that might have just been Wilbur’s ugly face.

“But donuts!” Tommy pushed the box towards Wilbur. “From Niki’s! She said she picked out the best ones for us!”

Wilbur ignored the donuts, crossing his arms. “I appreciate the gesture, but you need to take this seriously. This is still a job. You have to at least try.”

Tommy smirked, “You want me to try? Why don’t you try deez—”

Wilbur snatched the box out of his hands before Tommy could even finish his hilarious joke.

“What the hell!”

“You brought these for the employees of the store, right? Well, I guess until you start doing some work you don’t get to have any,” Wilbur then turned and handed the box to Ranboo.

“Happy first day, Ranboo.”

“Oh, thanks Mr. S—er— Wilbur,” Ranboo replied as he cautiously took the box. He smiled as he opened the box.

Techno leaned over Ranboo's shoulder and noted, "He was right. Niki did give us good ones."

"This isn't fair," Tommy groaned, watching the two of them each pick out a donut.

"Don't blame me for the natural consequences of your actions," Wilbur shrugged.

Tommy shot him a glare. "I most definitely can blame you, you sweater-vest-obsessed weirdo!"

A puzzled look covered Wilbur's face. "Sweater-vests are a perfectly good piece of clothing! Plus at least I do my laundry regularly. When was the last time you washed those pants? Last month?"

"Washing clothes is a waste of time! I'm a busy guy!"

"You are a disgusting child, you know that?"

"At least I'm not aging like milk!"

"I'm surprised you were able to use a simile correctly since you're always failing my class."

"You're not even my English teacher so you can't hold that against me."

Wilbur raised an eyebrow. "Who said I wasn't your English teacher anymore?"

Tommy paused. He took a step back as he assessed his co-worker. He was wearing a long brown coat over his white button-down and sweater vest. A messenger bag rested on his shoulder with a few papers poking out of the flap. His round glasses were balanced on his nose and he had styled his curly brown hair. There was nothing unusual about the outfit. It was his basic outfit when he taught— oh. *Oh no.*

"There's no fucking way they let you come back!" Tommy replied.

Wilbur shrugged. "Well, there is technically a teacher shortage. Plus I never officially resigned so..."

"Well, you're still an old, balding, little bitch with a cringe English degree."

"If I'm a little bitch then I guess you're a microscopic one."

"Ha. Ha. Eat glass."

"Nah, I'd rather have a donut," Wilbur then leaned over the counter and grabbed a chocolate glazed from the box. "Unlike you."

"Oh fuck you!" Tommy lunged forward, scrambling for the pastry. However, Wilbur raised the donut just out of Tommy's reach. As he clawed Wilbur's arm, he continued, "You don't deserve that you wrinkly piece of shit!"

“Ugh! Get off of me!” Wilbur tried to push Tommy off of him. However, no matter how hard he tried to pull him off, Tommy wouldn’t budge. Then Wilbur exclaimed, “Did you anchor your fucking gravity to me?!”

Tommy let out a sinister laugh. “Unless you give me that donut, you will never get rid of me.”

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. He then shoved the donut into his mouth and swallowed it whole. An evil grin spread across his face as he replied, “What donut?”

Tommy’s face twisted with anger. He started to punch the English teacher, but Wilbur just laughed as Tommy ranted, “I’m going to end you! If I had a knife I would stab you over and over and over and over again and you would be screaming for help and no one would help you because you are a monster with such an ugly face that people throw up from your ugliness and they die and then—”

“Alright, alright,” Phil walked out from behind a bookshelf. “Tommy, let him go. Wilbur, stop fighting with a teenager.”

Tommy grunted disapprovingly as he released his gravity, but he continued to glare at Wilbur.

“He started it!” Wilbur protested.

“And you are an adult,” Phil replied.

“Yeah, Wilbur, you’re an *adult*,” Tommy repeated mockingly, “An old crusty dusty adult.”

Phil crossed his arms and turned toward Tommy. “Don’t act like you’re not a part of this. You were late to work.”

“I was getting donuts!” Tommy refuted. He frowned as he heard a few snickers coming from behind him.

“And that was very nice, but you need to manage your time better,” Phil answered. “There’s no problem with you completing your work-study scholarship at the bookstore, but you still need to do the ‘work’ part of the work-study.”

Tommy huffed reluctantly, “Fine...”

“I told ya,” Wilbur commented under his breath.

“That’s rich coming from you,” Phil said, directing his attention to his son, “since you are currently late for *your* job.”

“Wha—” Wilbur whipped out his watch and cursed loudly. Tommy then yelped as Wilbur punched him in the arm before running out the door. “See you guys later!”

Tommy rubbed his aching arm and grumbled, “Asshole.”

Phil shook his head. "Alright, Tommy. Let's get to it. Follow me."

"Don't you want me to help Ranboo learn the ropes? I bet he doesn't even know how to organize books correctly," Tommy replied.

"I've been to a bookstore before," Ranboo interjected. "I know how to shelve books."

"Shelve deez—"

"Ranboo's on the register right now with Techno," Phil cut him off. "They'll be fine. I need your help shelving the new stock."

Tommy took a longing glance at the box of donuts. Then Techno said, "We'll save you one. Probably."

"Hey!" Tommy frowned.

"Come on, mate," Phil called out as he headed down an aisle.

"I will send you into the sun if you don't save me one," Tommy threatened Ranboo.

Ranboo put his hands up in defense. "Don't rope me into this. It's my first day here."

"He won't do it," Techno countered. "Then he would have to come in on time."

"Tommy!" Phil's voice rose above the shelves.

Tommy flicked them off before rushing towards Phil.

—

The first time Phil led him through these bookshelves Tommy felt like he was roaming an endless maze. However, this time his body moved past the dark wood shelves as if he flowed through a stream, moving with the natural current. He took a deep breath of the smell of book glue and paper before he met Phil at a small reading nook with two cushioned chairs.

"Hey! This is where I had my interview!" Tommy remarked. The vague memory of nervous desperation passed through his mind. So much happened since then. It was like that interview happened to a completely different person.

"Oh yeah, it is," Phil said as he began looking through the books on the cart beside him. He let out a soft laugh. "I never expected to ever hire someone new here. Let alone two people."

"You did say it might be nice to have some new blood around. I think I did a good job showing you I had lots of blood!" Tommy joked. But then Phil turned to him with a solemn expression and guilt twisted in Tommy's stomach. He forgot that some people weren't amused by his jokes about his near-death experiences.

"Oh shit— I didn't mean it like— I'm sorry—" Tommy started but paused when Phil shook his head.

“No, no it’s fine. I’m the one who should be sorry. I know it’s been a few weeks now and I should be over it, but...” Phil turned back towards the cart with a thousand-miles-long look in his eyes. “I never expected all this.”

Tommy came up to the other side of the cart and lifted a book off of it. “I didn’t mean to cause you trouble. I only needed a job.”

Phil focused back in on Tommy and furrowed his brows. “You didn’t cause us any trouble, Tommy. In reality, it would be *us* causing problems for *you* .”

“But you guys were doing fine before you met me,” Tommy picked at the deckled edges of the book. Even though Phil, Techno, and Wilbur were also thieves, they weren’t hurting anyone by stealing a few things and running a bookshop. But that had all changed when Tommy had entered their lives.

Then, to Tommy’s surprise, Phil laughed.

“Wilbur wasn’t joking, was he? You never asked.”

Tommy scrunched his eyebrows. “Ask what?”

“You never asked what happened at the Academy. Did you?”

“Oh... um...” Tommy trailed off. He really didn’t think it was his place to ask about their time at the Academy. They never asked him about the details of his memories working for Dream, even when Tommy explained how Dream stole them from him. They continued to treat Tommy the same as always. That meant more to him than they would ever know.

“I didn’t think it was important,” Tommy continued with a shrug. He was being honest. He didn’t care about their history as heroes or how they became criminals. And even if he was curious about it, whatever they had done wouldn’t change how he felt about them. They were his friends. That’s all that mattered.

Phil hummed in understanding before turning back to the shelves.

Quiet quickly fell between them as they placed the books in their designated places. Tommy lowered himself to fill the bottom shelves as Phil filled the top ones. The ruffling of pages and soft thumps against the wood filled the air like a repetitive melody. It was the small things like this that reminded Tommy that even in a world of superheroes and supervillains and world-ending events, the mundane still existed. And a little simple was exactly what he needed.

They had gone through the majority of the cart when Phil spoke again, making Tommy jump.

“Did you know I thought Wilbur was powerless when I first adopted him?”

Tommy looked up at Phil who continued his focus on the empty spaces between the books. Wilbur didn’t spend much time reminiscing about his childhood. He was too busy giving Tommy bad grades. Tommy didn’t even know Wilbur was adopted, let alone if he was controlling sounds as a toddler or not. He couldn’t even imagine Wilbur as a child. If he

really had to, all he saw was Wilbur's ugly face on a baby's body. Okay, maybe Tommy shouldn't imagine that.

However, he had a feeling Phil wanted him to answer. He responded, "Oh, um, no, I didn't."

"Yeah, the adoption agency had even promoted him as 'easy' and 'well behaved.'"

Tommy stifled a laugh before backtracking, "Sorry, I bet he was fine."

"Nah," Phil shook his head, "even before his powers surfaced he was a menace to society. He was a good kid though. However, back then, the people adopting only wanted kids with some sort of flashy power."

"Is that what you wanted?" Tommy asked. He was still unsure of how to navigate the conversation without seeming like he was prying, but then again the way Phil looked at each book like it was a photo album of his family made Tommy a bit more comfortable about continuing.

"I wasn't even planning to have a kid. I just needed a job. Coincidentally I ended up at an adoption agency." Phil chuckled, "You can see how that turned out."

"Damn, Phil, you're hardcore for adopting two kids at one time. As a former kid myself, I can confidently say that kids are annoying as hell."

"Oh, I didn't adopt Techno from the adoption agency." Phil's voice had gone quiet. Tommy glanced over to see him staring at the book he was holding, deep in thought.

Shit. Tommy quickly backtracked, "I didn't mean to— I mean if you don't want to talk about this anymore we can stop..."

Phil raised his head, making Tommy pause. A solemn expression covered his face, but he still held onto a soft smile.

He carefully slid the book onto the shelf before going on, "During a time when TV shows and movies exist, some people claim that books have become obsolete. They would probably even argue that bookstores are even more so. However, those people fail to realize that books are simply a vessel. Books, shows, movies, music, art—they hold stories. All in different ways, they allow us to share our thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams in a form that others can hold.

"As much as society tells us to push down our feelings and keep on pushing forward, I don't think humans were built to hold them in. Eventually, our true emotions will come out, one way or another. That's why we have stories. So we can process all these mixed-up and uncontrollable thoughts in a way that helps others understand them as well. They are the building blocks of trust. We share stories of our lives with each other because we want the ones we care about to know all of us—the good, the bad, and everything in between."

Phil paused for a few counts before letting out a sigh. He turned towards Tommy again. "I know you don't care what happened in our past. But we care. We care that you know about

all of us– the good, the bad, and everything in between. We *want* you to know. You deserve the truth.”

Tommy opened his mouth to counter before stopping himself. His natural response was to protest. He had spent so long pushing away anything that could jeopardize his few friendships that it became an instinctual reaction. Most of the time when someone offered him something they wanted something else in return. Teachers wanted compliance. Foster parents wanted obedience. Dream wanted loyalty.

Yet, here Phil was. Ready to share a secret that had stayed between Wilbur, Techno, and Phil for years. They wanted to tell him.

Hm.

They wanted him to know them.

Hmmm.

They wanted to tell him the truth. They thought he deserved it.

Hmmmm.

And they wanted nothing in return.

Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

Tommy’s brain throbbed. Damn. Healing was exhausting.

He pushed himself up to his feet, meeting Phil’s eyes again with a smile. “Please tell me that Wilbur got expelled from hero school.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter is basically done. Ill post it tomorrow lol. and then AFTER THAT we will have the final chapter. cool? cool
thanks for sticking around and enjoying the story <3 I appreciate it so much <3

If you want updates about what's to come I'm always around at these places:

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitch](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

Phil the Father

Chapter Summary

All Phil wanted was a promotion.

Chapter Notes

tw // blood mention

and as always... if you see any grammar or misspelling mistakes... close ur eyes <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil did not know how to raise a kid.

He had just needed a job.

Yet here he was... with a kid.

The wheels of the grocery cart squeaked as Phil led it down the aisle while Wilbur trailed behind him. Phil used to feel weird about letting him out of his eyesight—something something about kidnapping or silent drownings— but he quickly learned that Wilbur would always find his way back to him with no problem.

Phil stopped and picked up a box of cereal. He held it up towards Wilbur and asked, “These are the ones you like, right?”

Wilbur nodded, his brown curls bouncing up and down. He then reached up and pointed at a chocolate version of the cereal and said, “I also like these. But we can get those if you want them.”

“I don’t mind trying something new.” He then switched out the boxes and placed the chocolate cereal in the cart. Wilbur smiled as they continued down the aisle.

Wilbur recently started to voice his opinions. The kid had been placed but then returned more than any other kid his age at the agency. It made sense why he was so reluctant to speak out at first, but it didn’t make it any better.

Phil had agreed to foster Wilbur for a month. They said that it would help him get a promotion. That was 9 months ago. And he didn’t even get that promotion. They gave it to fucking John Seamart.

He had no problem taking care of him. Wilbur was a good kid and he took care of himself. The problem was that Phil had no idea what the hell *he* was doing. There was definitely some sort of developmental shit that Phil should be helping Wilbur with but Phil didn't know crap. Plus with work, he barely remembered to feed himself let alone help build up a kid's emotional and social confidence.

The one thing that made it easier in all of this was that Wilbur was powerless. It was one of the reasons that he was having such a difficult time getting adopted. Phil remembered how difficult it had been for his parents to have a kid with wings so Wilbur having no powers eased some of his anxiety. Wilbur was just a kid. Phil could do this. He could take care of a kid.

They had just made it to the end of the aisle when Phil felt a slight tugging of his shirt. He turned to see Wilbur clutching his head, tears welling in his eyes.

"Wilbur!" Phil dropped to his knees, panic setting in.

Wilbur never cried. Even when he had scraped his knees so badly that they bled after falling on the playground last week, Wilbur acted like it was a slight annoyance. But this was different. Wilbur was squeezing the sides of his head so tightly his nails were digging into his temples as tears flowed down his cheeks.

"What happened!? You gotta talk to me!" He hovered around the kid, trying to figure out what to do. He could feel the eyes of the other customers on his back as his mind raced for a solution. However, Phil wasn't even sure if he should touch him or not.

Through sobs, Wilbur choked out, "It's too m-much. It's-s s-so loud."

"What's loud?" Phil's creased his eyebrows together. This was not good. This was not good at all. Wilbur was shaking now, burrowing his face into Phil's chest.

Muffled by his shirt, Wilbur cried, "Everything."

—

Phil had just set the timer for the pasta when the door of the apartment clicked open. Wilbur's voice came next. "Hey Phil, I'm home!"

"I'm in the kitchen!" Phil replied as he stirred the pasta sauce.

Wilbur had been enrolled at the Justice Academy for a year now, right after the adoption papers were signed. The school was all year round, but Wilbur visited home during the weekends since they lived so close.

"Ooh! That smells good!" Wilbur said as he popped his head into the kitchen. "Much better than the slop they serve us at lunch."

"It can't be that bad," Phil proposed. "Plus isn't your lunch specially made to be like good for you?"

“Just because it’s good for me doesn’t mean it tastes good!”

Phil let out a small laugh. So much happened in the past year. After Wilbur’s powers manifested, life became a bit of a mess. He was so sensitive... to everything. It was like every click, every tap, every single sound had been set to 1000% for him. The only way he could function was when he was near Phil.

But Phil knew Wilbur couldn’t live like this. He couldn’t be attached to Phil at the hip to just be able to turn on the faucet. However, Phil had no idea how to help him.

Then the Justice Council introduced their new school for children with exceptional superpowers: The Justice Academy. They claimed that they would help each of their students be able to control their powers and if they so chose, they could give back to the city once they graduated—a.k.a. become *heroes*. Phil wasn’t sure if Wilbur would ever want to be a hero, but he knew that Wilbur needed help.

And one year later, Wilbur was at the top of his class. He excelled in all parts of school, not just academically. He was outgoing and talkative. He would spend his extra time training and fine-tuning his powers. The quiet kid that Phil adopted was no more. Wilbur was set on being a hero. And he was going to be the best. Phil had a feeling.

“What are you doing standing in the hallway?” Phil asked. The timer for the pasta went off. “Come here and help set the table.”

Wilbur stepped into the kitchen, fiddling with his hands. “Yeah, I was just about to do that but I had a question to ask first.”

Phil raised an eyebrow as he poured the pasta into a strainer at the sink. “What did you do now?”

Wilbur raised his hands in mock defense. “I promise I didn’t do anything! I just was wondering if I could potentially invite a friend over.”

“A friend? Hm... I didn’t even know you had friends,” Phil answered with a smirk.

“Hey! I have plenty of friends!”

“Sorry! Sorry!” Phil apologized. “I just had to do it. Of course, you can have your friends over. When were you thinking—”

“Great! This is my friend, Techno!” Wilbur turned back to the hallway and pulled a kid into the kitchen.

Wilbur’s friend—Techno—raised his hand and waved. He was around the same height as Wilbur but stood slightly slouched as if he was trying to be as small as possible. He had short pink hair and wore the same uniform as Wilbur.

Phil almost dropped the pot of pasta. It took him a second to realize that Wilbur had just brought this child to their home without telling him. Phil hadn’t been a parent very long, but he was pretty sure kids were supposed to at least notify parents before doing shit like this.

He let out a sigh before putting down the pot and turning off the stove. “It’s very nice to meet you, Techno. But I need to talk to my son for just a second. Why don’t you come here and start setting the table?”

Techno nodded as he made his way to the plates from the counter. Phil gestured for Wilbur to follow him into the connecting living room. Once they were out of earshot, Phil crossed his arms and whispered, “You can’t just bring your friends over without telling me!”

A sheepish look spread across Wilbur’s face. Phil felt bad, but this is what parents are supposed to do. Right?

Wilbur replied, “I’m sorry. I knew that we weren’t doing anything this weekend so I just had him come along.”

“What about his parents? Don’t you think they will wonder where their son is?”

Wilbur lowered his head. “Techno doesn’t have any parents. He lives at the school all the time.”

Fuck. Guilt stabbed him in the chest. Now he felt really bad. He dragged his hand through his hair and let out another sigh. There was only so much sighing a man could do.

“Alright. He can stay. But next time, no surprises. Okay?”

“Thank you so much, Phil!” Wilbur jumped forward and hugged him. Okay. Maybe he was on the right track with this dad thing.

Phil gave him a quick squeeze back. Then a question slipped out of his mouth. “You told the school you were bringing him over, right?”

Wilbur nervously laughed, “Um...”

Phil pulled back, his face now serious. “You didn’t tell—”

He was cut off by the sound of something shattering. The two of them twisted towards the kitchen to see Techno surrounded by a broken plate. He stared at them with wide eyes.

They rushed over as Phil said, “Don’t worry! It was just an accident.”

Techno shook his head and then pointed at the front door. Phil raised an eyebrow. “What—”

This time he was cut off by a loud knocking at the door. The color drained from Techno’s face as Wilbur’s brows furrowed together in worry.

“It’s someone from school,” Wilbur whispered. He stepped around the broken plate and grabbed Techno’s hand.

The knocking now became banging. Not even five minutes ago, Phil’s biggest worry was overcooking the pasta. What the hell was he supposed to do? His kid had basically kidnapped

another kid! He knew firsthand how strict the Justice Academy was. Wilbur wasn't even allowed to tell him his class schedule or who his teachers were.

Phil's gut twisted. How would that affect Wilbur's placement at the school? Would he get expelled? Wilbur needed this school! Without it who the hell knew what he would do? What if they took Wilbur away... Phil shook the thought away. He couldn't afford to think like that.

"Stay here and don't move," Phil commanded. He made his way to the door, holding in as much false confidence as he could. Wilbur and Techno needed him to be the adult.

He forced his hands to stop shaking as he cracked open the door. He peaked through the opening to see two large men in dark suits and sunglasses. They looked almost identical except that one on the right had a giant scar across his cheek.

"May I help you?" Phil asked. These guys looked like they could flick him across the room with their pinky. Why the hell did they send guys like this for a 9-year-old?

"We are from the Academy. Are you the guardian of Wilbur Soot?" The man with the scar flatly asked.

"I am his father. Is something wrong?" That was the first time Phil had ever admitted that. He opened the door fully. He wasn't going to let these men think they could intimidate him.

The scarred man continued, "He was seen leaving the Academy premises with another student named Techno. However, even though Wilbur had permission to leave campus, Techno did not. We have come to retrieve him."

Even though he hadn't known for Techno very long, Phil knew that Wilbur did. His son's smile flashed in his mind. Wilbur wanted his friend to come over so badly that he was willing to break the rules. However, that was classic Wilbur. If he set his mind to something, there was no stopping him. Which meant that nothing could stop Phil either.

Phil let out a soft chuckle, cutting through the tension. "I think there has been a bit of a mix-up. My son had simply told me that he was bringing his friend over and I told him he could. I didn't realize he needed permission from the school. I am so sorry for the mistake."

"You are confirming that Techno is in your home?" The men tried to look past Phil but Phil flared out his wings a bit more, covering the whole entrance.

"Techno is here. And I promise he is in good hands. I have no problem bringing him back to school on Monday." Phil could feel sweat start to drip down his neck. The man to the left had not spoken a word, but Phil could feel his eyes piercing him.

"Sir, you do not understand. Techno is not—" The scarred man was interrupted by a buzzing in his pocket. He held his finger up as he pulled a phone out. He then stepped a few feet back, taking the call and leaving Phil with the other man. They spent a few uncomfortable seconds in silence before the scarred man returned.

“I’ve spoken with administration. They have approved this visit. Transport will retrieve him tomorrow at oh-six hundred,” The man stated before they both turned around and left Phil standing in the doorframe alone.

It took a few seconds for his pulse to quiet down in his ears so he could understand his thoughts. He hadn’t realized his legs had been shaking so badly. They didn’t take Techo. They didn’t threaten Wilbur. They had done nothing.

Phil jumped at the feeling of someone touching his wings. He twisted around to see Wilbur and Techno behind him. He immediately knelt down and swooped them into his arms. They were okay. They were all going to be okay. He pulled back and gave them both a smile.

“Thank you, Phil,” Wilbur said. He grabbed Phil’s hand and gave it a squeeze.

Phil squeezed it back before rising to his feet again and shutting the door. “No problem, mate.”

Phil was Wilbur’s father. This was his kid.

He then ruffled Wilbur’s hair before turning to Techno and asking, “Do you like pasta?”

—

“Would it be possible to write a message on this?” Phil asked.

The baker across the counter raised an eyebrow. They replied, “On a pie?”

Phil sheepishly chuckled. “My son likes pies more than cake. Especially the ones with this crumble on the top. All you have to write is ‘Happy 15th Birthday,’ nothing else!”

“It’s your pie,” The baker answered nonchalantly. Then they took the pie behind the counter and started decorating it.

Phil began to go through his mental checklist. He had gotten supplies for dinner and more than enough mashed potatoes. He would grab the balloons at the party store near the apartment. He already had candles from last year. Phil couldn’t really think of anything else he needed to get. Wilbur’s birthday party should be all set!

‘Party’ was probably an over-exaggeration. It was more like dinner with pie and balloons. The only people who would be there would be Wilbur, Phil, and Techno. They used to invite more people, but over the last couple of years, the number of invitees had dwindled and now Wilbur only wanted it to be the three of them.

“Here you go,” The baker said as they handed him the now-decorated pie. ‘Happy 15th Birthday’ was written with swoopy blue icing letters. Perfect.

Phil thanked them and headed out. He had only made it halfway to his car when his phone rang. He pulled it out to find the number of the Academy.

“Hello?” Phil said, answering the phone.

“Is this Mr. Craft?” a deep voice replied from the other side of the phone.

“This is he. May I ask who is speaking?”

“This is the Academy.”

Phil felt his stomach flip. The Academy never called. If they needed something from their student’s parents they would send an email or a physical letter. Phil had never received a call from them. Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.

The voice continued, “We are calling concerning your son.”

A cold sweat covered his whole body. Phil choked out, “W-Wilbur? What happened? Is everything alright?”

“We wanted to inform you that your son was badly injured during a recent training exercise. He is recovering—”

Phil was in his car before the pie hit the ground.

Panic flooded his mind the whole ride to the school. The man on the phone had said he was badly injured. How injured? How badly? How the hell could have this happened? This was a school for hero trainees! Phil knew that they would get hurt but how hurt could he have gotten that they needed to inform him? Was Wilbur even awake? Was he in a coma? Phil barely could keep his thoughts in order. They were pounding against his skull. His car skidded to a stop at the front of the school as Phil ran into the main building.

The secretary behind the front desk began, “Sir, do you—”

“Where is the infirmary?!” Phil demanded. His wings fanned out in distress.

“Sir, I cannot allow you to enter without—”

“You don’t understand,” Phil felt his voice raise. “ *It is not up for discussion.* My son is hurt. I need to see him *now.* ”

“I—” She was cut off by the phone ringing. She picked it up and mumbled something into it. She then turned back to Phil and said, “If you go down that hallway and take a right—”

“Thank you so much,” Phil shouted as he sprinted away.

Running on pure adrenaline, blood rushed in his ears. He clipped the corner as he turned the corner, sending a sharp pain into his shoulder. And then it hit him. The screaming.

His breath stopped in his throat.

It was Wilbur.

Phil was about to go on a warpath. At the end of the hallway, two men in suits came out from behind double doors.

“Where the fuck is my son?!” Phil roared as he marched up to the men. He recognized one of them as the man with a scar on his cheek.

The scarred man flatly replied, “Your son is fine. He is in recovery.”

Phil’s heart dropped as another scream came through the door. “He doesn’t sound fine! What the fuck is going on?!”

“He is upset. He is being contained now.”

Rage heated Phil’s face. He was being *what?*

He no longer cared about the consequences. He pushed the men out of the way and plowed through the doors. Then his blood went cold.

Wilbur was restrained to the bed by multiple sentries. He was thrashing around as they held down his wrists and ankles. A doctor loomed over him with a syringe.

“WILBUR!” Phil shouted. Everyone in the room froze, twisting towards him. He lunged forward, shoving the sentries away from his son.

“Sir, you are not authorized—” The doctor started, but Phil slapped the syringe out of his hand.

“I am *his father* ! Get the hell away from him!” Phil snapped back.

“Ph-Phil?” Wilbur’s voice was so rough, he could barely get the words out.

Phil grabbed his hand and squeezed it. “I’m right here, mate. I’m right here. You’re going to be okay.”

Wilbur squeezed his hand back and the relief washed over him. However, this was short-lived as he glanced at the blood-soaked bandages covering Wilbur’s chest. Anxiety buzzed behind his chest now, making it hard for air to enter his lungs. Wilbur was hurt. Wilbur was very hurt. Who had done this? Why had it been him? Was this targeted? Weren’t there supposed to be heroes at this school? How the hell could they let this happen—

Wilbur squeezed Phil’s hand again, pulling him away from his mind. Tears began to well in his eyes. Phil hadn’t seen him cry in years. Not since his powers manifested. Wilbur choked out, “Y-you need t-to t-tell th-them it w-was an a-accident. P-please Phil!”

Phil furrowed his brows. “Accident?”

Wilbur tightened his grip on Phil’s hand. “They t-took him away Phil, but he didn’t mean it! It was an accident! They’re going to punish him, but I’m okay now! You can’t let them take him away! It’s not his fault—”

“Who are you talking about?” Phil interrupted. Wilbur’s words were falling out of him at a break-neck speed. Phil could barely keep up.

“Techno! They took him away!”

“What?” Phil’s voice was barely a whisper. “Techno did this?”

Quiet and simple Techno? Techno who got excited about potatoes? Techno who took 3 years to say a simple word to Phil? *That Techno?* Over the past 6 years, Phil never even saw Techno be annoyed. He couldn’t imagine Techno being upset enough to do something like this, even as an accident.

“It wasn’t on purpose. Techno didn’t mean it,” Wilbur pleaded. “Phil, please. *You have to believe me.*”

Phil let out a soft sigh. He needed to get it together. For Wilbur. “Of course, I believe you. Let me go talk to them.”

Tears rolled down Wilbur’s cheeks. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

Phil nodded. He stood up and then turned towards the doctor and the sentries. In a low voice, he said, “Don’t go near him.”

The door clicked closed and he found himself in the hallway again. The two men were right where Phil had left them.

“What the fuck happened?” Phil demanded, walking up to them.

“There was an incident during a training exercise. Your son was the only student affected,” The scarred man replied as if Wilbur tripped over something instead of bleeding out of his chest.

Heat warmed his cheeks as Phil snapped, “That’s it? That’s all you’re going to fucking tell me?”

“The rest of the information is classified.”

“What a fucking joke! My son is currently in a hospital bed! Tell me what the fuck happened!”

“Sir. That information is classified.”

Phil dug his nails into his palms to keep from mauling the man. Through clenched teeth, he went on, “Fine. Then tell me where is my son’s friend, Techno? He keeps asking about him.”

“That information is classified.”

Phil’s voice started to get louder. “If you want my son to calm down, then you need to tell us where Techno is! There’s no way he could have done this!”

“Any information regarding the incident or any other student is classified, Mr. Craft.”

“My son just wants to know if he’s safe! Just tell me if he’s safe or not!”

“That information is—”

“Bullshit! For years, I’ve dealt with your fucking rules and procedures! I sent my son to a fucking school that didn’t tell me anything! Yet here I am asking what the fuck happened to my son and this is all you’re going to say?! Seriously? Well, *fuck that! We don’t need you anymore.*”

Phil twisted back into the room and yelled, “We’re leaving!”

Wilbur knitted his eyebrows together. “What? Didn’t you talk to them?”

“Oh, we talked,” Phil replied as he started to help Wilbur sit up. “They told me jack-shit.”

The doctor started to come forward, countering, “Sir, your son should really stay—”

“I’m not letting my son stay here for another fucking second!” Phil snapped, flaring out his wings. “And if you try to stop me, I’ll make sure you regret that choice.”

“But what about Techno?” Wilbur asked. He winced as Phil lifted him into his arms.

“We’ll come back for him. I swear.”

Phil didn’t realize it at the time, but that was the first time he lied to Wilbur.

—

It took Wilbur two weeks to recover from his injury.

Four weeks later, Phil gave up calling.

Six weeks later, Wilbur started to speak to Phil again.

Eight weeks later, Wilbur went to a new school.

“So how was your first day?” Phil asked.

Wilbur wordlessly shrugged as he pushed the mashed potatoes around the plate.

Phil continued despite the awkwardness settling in. This was what good fathers were supposed to do. “Were you able to get into the music class? I heard they have a good program.”

“I don’t know,” Wilbur mumbled. “I just went to the classes on my schedule.”

“What about lunch? How was the food at this school?”

“It was fine.”

“Okay... Did you like your teachers?”

“They were fine.”

“What about your classmates? Any potential friends?”

Wilbur looked up with tired eyes. “Can I please be excused?”

“But you didn’t eat anything...”

“I’m not hungry. Can I please be excused?” Wilbur was already holding his plate in his hands.

Phil sighed. “Yes, you may go.”

The chair scraped along the floor when Wilbur stood. He then placed his dish in the sink before exiting the kitchen without a second glance. A few seconds later, a door slammed on the other side of the apartment.

Phil ran his hand through his hair. What the hell was he going to do with that boy? How long was Wilbur going to hold a fucking grudge against him? And for what? Because Phil wouldn’t let him *raid the fucking Justice Academy*?! There was no way raising a teenager was this difficult.

Maybe it was just Phil. Maybe he was never cut out for this. All he had wanted was a promotion. He didn’t even last a year at the adoption agency after adopting Wilbur. When had his life dissolved into being a father? Who was he even before then?

He was an unreliable temp worker. He was flighty. He was alone.

But he didn’t want to go back to that. He didn’t want that life anymore. He stared at Wilbur’s empty chair.

So why wasn’t he fighting harder for the life he had now?

Phil forced himself to his feet and started to clean the table. He allowed himself to go into autopilot, pushing his thoughts into the back of his head. There was no point mulling over them when he had things to do.

He had just finished putting the dishes away when the doorbell rang. Phil frowned as he tried to think if he had ordered something, but then again why would someone be dropping off packages at this later into the evening?

He slowly opened the door a crack and peeked through. He saw a pair of red shoes and he began to say, “Do you need—?”

Phil froze as he made eye contact with the visitor.

He knew the visitor. He had the same face as the boy who had entered his kitchen 6 years ago.

But instead of pink, his hair was red.

His whole body was red.

He was covered in blood.

“Techno?”

—

“Mr. Craft, why should we listen to anything you have to say?” asked a voice from beyond the elevated judge’s bench. Phil strained to see who spoke, but their faces were obscured by shadows, making it hard to figure out who it was.

Of course, information about the Justice Council can be found all over the internet. Their faces and names were public knowledge. But here, in this giant courtroom, surrounded by guards, only with his two teenage boys, Phil felt like he was being judged by gods.

To be honest, right now, they were gods to him.

They had the fate of his family in their hands.

“Not only did you harbor and aid a dangerous individual, but when asked to hand him over you refused,” The same voice continued. “We should detain all three of you right now.”

Phil his hands out in defense. “Please, I’m trying to solve all of this peacefully. No one else needs to get hurt.”

Techno shifted behind him, but Phil kept his eyes forward. He went on, “I will take full responsibility for both of the boys. Let just us go and we will never get in your way again.”

“This is ridiculous,” A new voice chimed in. “That monster killed seven agents with his bare hands! Not to forget that the other one threatened to make the entire Council deaf if we did not agree to this meeting! Why are we even allowing this blasphemy?!”

Wilbur began to move forward, snapping, “You wanted to kill him—!”

Phil put his hand forward and swiftly cut him off, “Please forgive my son’s temper. He is young and still learning. You all know this. He was your student. You’ve seen him grow.”

Scattered murmuring crossed the bench. Various comments about Wilbur’s ranking and ability floated down to where they stood.

After a few counts, the original voice spoke, “There is no doubt that both these children are powerful. So that begs the question: *why would we trust them with you, Mr. Craft?* Are you not just a civilian? How can we trust that you can control two children that are unpredictable and dangerous?”

Phil dropped his eyes to the ground. He clenched his hands into fists to keep them from shaking, but he was unsuccessful.

He had no idea what he was doing.

Yet here he was... standing in front of the most powerful people in the city.

And weren't they right though? Why should Phil raise these kids? All he was a simple guy with wings. It was one of the most common powers in the world.

But Wilbur and Techno? They were special. They needed more than he could provide them.

Maybe he should drop this. Maybe he should give up this whole father thing. He hadn't even fostered Wilbur for the right reasons. All he wanted was a dumb fucking promotion. And now he was offering to take another kid? One that killed seven Academy agents? Why the hell was he fighting the Justice Council for two kids?

Why was he doing this?

And then,

He felt someone squeeze his right hand.

Phil turned to see Wilbur letting go of his hand before giving him a soft smile.

Then someone nudged his left shoulder.

Phil twisted the other way. Techno stood on his older side and gave him a short nod.

And there it was.

It was never about Phil being the perfect father.

It was the fact that *he was one* .

Phil let out a deep breath before looking back up at the Council.

“You can trust me because *I am their father*. You might have taught them how to be superhumans, but I was the one who raised them to be *human beings* . And I will continue to do that. They are not mine to control. They are their own people with their own dreams and desires and whatever the hell they want, because they deserve that. They deserve to be more than their powers. And I swear I will protect them with my life. *I will never let you take them away from me again* .”

His words hung in silence for a beat, before the Council burst into a frenzy of whispers. The onslaught of overlapping murmurs slapped Phil in the face, making him dizzy but that also might have been his short confidence boost draining from his system.

It took him a second to realize that he just outwardly defied the Justice Council. Did he also threaten them? Phil wasn't sure just came out of his mouth. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuckity fuck fUCK-*

“Mr. Craft,” the main voice of the Council boomed, snapping Phil back into reality.

“Y-” Phil cleared his throat, attempting to bring out his confidence again. “Yes?”

“You make some interesting claims. And what will happen if we take these boys away from you anyway?”

A spark of anger seared behind his chest. The fucking nerve these people had.

“As I said, I cannot control my boys. And I can guarantee you, *neither can you*. And I don’t want *anyone else* to get hurt.”

“Are you threatening us, Mr. Craft?”

“I promise we will never cause you any trouble. Please. Let us go.”

A few moments of suffocating silence passed through the courtroom. Phil resisted the urge to grab the boys and fly straight out of there. But instead, he continued to stand. For Wilbur and Techno. For his sons.

And then, the voice came through,

“The Council will allow you to keep them.”

Relief crashed into his body so forcefully that his knees almost gave out. Phil grabbed Wilbur and Techno’s shoulders to stabilize his balance. At the same time, multiple other voices from the council began to argue with the original voice.

However, the original voice raised its volume. “*Silence!* Our job is to protect the citizens of this city and Mr. Craft has been an upstanding citizen of this city for his entire life. Now he wants to continue our mission. If he is willing to take these children under his care and help them assimilate into society, then we should support him.”

A few unsure mumbles began but were cut off by the voice. “However, Mr. Craft, *the Council will not hesitate to eliminate any and all threats to the city*. Is that understood?”

Phil nodded. “Understood. May we leave now?”

“Yes.”

Phil spun around and placed his hands on the backs of his sons, making sure he was between them and the Council.

As they rushed out of the room, the voice called out, “Good luck, Mr. Craft. You will need it.”

But Phil kept his eyes forward.

He didn’t need luck.

He had his sons.

—

“Wait, so how did you become thieves?” Tommy asked, tilting his head.

He sat across from Phil on the other cushioned chair. It was the same chair that he had sat on when Phil first brought him here. But he wasn't the same kid. Phil wasn't even sure if should call him a kid anymore. No kid should go through what Tommy had.

Phil shrugged. "We just started doing that as a side hustle after Wilbur graduated university and we opened the bookstore. Needed the extra cash."

"Who would hire a bunch of bookstore nerds?"

"Well, our first client was ironically someone you know. You remember Quackity, right? However, at the time he was Wilbur's classmate from university."

"Quackity?! Prime, why are all my teachers a part of organized crime?"

"Teachers aren't paid much."

"Damn... And then you guys met me right?"

"Yep. And then we met you."

"So that's it?"

"That's it. I was against stealing at first, but you know Wilbur. I couldn't let him run amok all alone. He would most definitely be caught."

Tommy pursed his lips in thought. Then after a few moments, he said, "You're a good dad, Phil."

Phil was taken aback for a second. He didn't know it was possible for Tommy to give a genuine compliment.

Then a smile spread across his face as he stood up from the chair. "Thank you."

Tommy followed his lead and also rose to his feet. Phil came to his side and ruffled his hair. "I'm trying my best."

"Well, out of all the father figures I've had you're definitely the best to me," Tommy muttered under his breath.

"Do you see me as a father figure, Tommy?" Phil raised his eyebrow.

Tommy looked up at him with wide eyes. He definitely didn't mean for Phil to hear that. He backtracked, "W-what? No! I said you were a *bother* figure to me! Because you're always bothering me and making do shit!"

Phil chuckled. "I'm fucking with you, mate. But for future reference, you should really refrain from saying things like that to your boss."

"Good thing that you can never fire me then."

“Who said that?”

“I almost died, Phil! You can’t fire people that almost died, it’s the law.”

“Prime... you’re almost as dramatic as Wilbur,” Phil said, shaking his head.

Tommy frowned. “Don’t compare me to that balding loser!”

“Okay! Okay!” Phil held his hands up. “I’m sorry, full-head-of-hair winner.”

“Thank you. Thank you.”

Phil shook his head with a smile before heading over to the empty cart. “Alright, there are a few more put-back carts we need to finish before you can earn your donut.”

“Wait, I don’t get the donut now?” Tommy pouted.

“You’re going to keep on complaining about the donut until you get one, aren’t you?”

Tommy nodded. “Oh yeah, you’re about to never hear the end of it. The fact that you’re depriving me, a huge buff man who almost died and saved the world, one of the greatest things ever made in this lifetime is actually a crime. I will continue to fight for my rights to eat that donut because I have earned that right and your authority does not scare me—”

“Oh my Prime, go get a donut.”

“Let’s go!” Tommy ran down the aisle, towards the front. “Thank you!”

A few seconds later he started to hear the beginnings of Tommy berating Ranboo and Techno. Phil wore a smile as he headed towards them.

Phil didn’t know how families worked.

Yet here he was... with a family.

And he wouldn’t change a thing

Chapter End Notes

I just couldn't stop myself from giving you just a speck more of lore <3 thank you so much for reading I always love reading your comments and thoughts about my silly little story <3

and I'm always around at these places:

[My Instagram](#)

[My Twitch](#)

[The Untitled Discord](#)

Rule #25: The Stars are Better in Logstedshire

Chapter Notes

lets do this one last time (for this vol. at least)

and remember please close ur eyes if you see any mistakes <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“How the hell do heroes make this look easy?” Tommy asked.

He anchored his gravity to the branch he was on. Across from him, on the edge of that branch was an orange tabby cat clawing into the bark and staring daggers at Tommy. He reached out to only be met with a loud hiss.

Tommy put his hands up in defense. “I’m trying to help you!” he hissed back.

Cats were never the biggest fans of Tommy and Tommy was more than glad to return the sentiment. He was more of a raccoon fan. Raccoons would never get stuck in trees and then need to be saved from the problem they put themselves in. Raccoons were simply better. Tommy attempted to take a step forward, but the cat hissed again and swatted at him.

“Okay! Okay! I’m stepping b–OOF” he was cut off by slamming his head on a branch above him. For a moment, he lost his grip on his anchor and he threw his hands forward grabbing the trunk to keep his balance. From the corner of his eye, he noticed a crowd starting to form around the base of the tree.

Tommy groaned. More people meant more phones and phones meant pictures and pictures meant heroes. As much as he’d like to embarrass another hero just like the last 6 times he escaped them, Tommy didn’t have time to do a full chase scene today.

A breeze ruffled the leaves and the golden sunset peaked behind their shadows. When he said that he was going to go on a short patrol before meeting up with his friends, he didn’t expect to spend half of it struggling to get a cat out of a tree. At this pace, he would never make it to the meeting spot on time. And he didn’t even have any donuts to bring this time.

He turned and faced the cat. Then he furrowed his eyebrows in focus as he said, “Fuck it. I’m speedrunning this.”

The cat hissed.

“You can hiss all you like, but I’m saving you whether you like it or not.”

Then he took a big step forward, stretching towards the cat. All he needed was a touch. But, the cat yowled and scrambled back. The branch began to bend due to the sudden weight change causing the cat to meow frantically as it had reached the end of the branch.

“Shit!” Tommy cursed.

“Is everything okay?!” A young voice called out. “Is Mr. Mittens going to fall?!”

Tommy glanced down and saw the little girl who had asked for his help. She looked like she was on the brink of tears.

“Don’t worry! I have everything under control! Mr. Mittens will be just fine!” Tommy shouted back. It wasn’t a complete lie. Mr. Mittens would probably be fine even if he fell from this height. Tommy had fallen from higher and he was totally fine. Physically.

However, letting a cat fall out of a tree wasn’t very hero-like. Not that Tommy was a hero, but vigilantes couldn’t let cats fall out of trees either.

“Shit,” Tommy cursed under his breath. He could feel the branch bending more and more and he inched towards the cat. The feline was too busy howling for help to hiss at him anymore, but Mr. Mittens had no problem with continuing to claw Tommy away. He racked his mind for a solution. He couldn’t just jump at the cat without getting his eyes clawed out, but what other options did he have? He couldn’t use his powers on the cat if he couldn’t touch him.

However, before Tommy could make a decision, Mr. Mittens lost his grip on the branch.

The little girl’s scream cut through the air and Tommy did what he did best. He acted without thinking.

He needed to save the cat. Save the cat. Save the cat. Save the cat.

He thrust his hands out. As the pressure of his powers swam through his muscles, his arms tingled with warmth. But once the warmth reached his fingertips, he continued to aim that energy forward, aiming beyond his body.

Save the cat.

Save the cat.

Save the—

Then,

Mr. Mittens stopped mid-air.

For a moment, Tommy thought time paused. But then Mr. Mittens let out another meow as he whipped his tail around. Mr. Mittens was floating.

Tommy then realized he was a few inches off the branch. A dozen of loose leaves gently bumped into him. Then it struck him.

He had controlled gravity *without touching it*.

He stared at his hands, dumbfounded.

He created an anti-gravity field.

However, he couldn't ponder this new ability for very long. Various voices shouted from below.

"She's flying!"

"Someone needs to get her!"

"Vigilante!"

Tommy twisted around to see Mr. Mittens' owner floating a few feet off the ground, just like Mr. Mittens himself. She must've tried to catch her cat and gotten caught in the field.

"Mr. Mittens, I'm here!" She said, trying to swim in the air towards her cat, but failing to move.

"I got him!" Tommy yelled as he pushed off the tree towards the cat.

However, right as he came close, Mr. Mittens instantly recognized him. He hissed and flailed around even more in the air.

"I just saved you from falling out of a tree and this is the thanks I get!" Tommy argued as grabbed the unruly pet. Then Mr. Mittens howled before digging his claws into his hands and arms, latching himself onto the vigilante. Mr. Mittens seemed very grateful to be saved.

Luckily, as Tommy tried to keep Mr. Mittens from scratching off his mask, the two of them drifted into the little girl.

"You saved him!" She exclaimed as she plucked her cat off of Tommy like she was picking off a piece of lint. The moment Mr. Mittens was in her arms, a flip was switched, and he started purring. She looked up at Tommy with a bright smile and said, "Thank you so much."

He placed his scratched-up hand on her back and slowly lowered the three of them onto the ground. Tommy couldn't help but smile back. "No problem."

Suddenly, she lunged forward and squeezed his side with a one-armed hug. She replied, "You're my favorite hero, Mr. Vigilante."

"Oh-um- thank you-" but before Tommy could even fully process the compliment, the people around him began to clap.

He flashed a sheepish smile as he raised his hand in thanks. He hadn't even done anything spectacular. Even though he was confused, he couldn't deny that he liked the appreciation. Most of the time people were trying to kill him or throw him into jail. It was a nice change of pace.

Unfortunately, he couldn't enjoy the applause for very long as a faint siren sounded in the distance. He quickly patted the head of the little girl and said, "Please keep Mr. Mittens away from trees. He is not a big fan of heights."

Then Mr. Mittens made eye contact with him and hissed. Tommy continued, "Or me."

The girl nodded and Tommy waved again before jumping towards the nearest roof.

His face had a grin plastered on as one thought buzzed in his mind.

She said I was her favorite hero.

—

Tommy skidded to a stop as he felt something stab his foot. At the same time, his phone vibrated in his fanny pack. He answered and immediately regretted it.

"You're dead to me and so are your amiibos," Tubbo's voice flatly stated through the phone.

"What?! I didn't even do anything!" Tommy claimed. He sat down on the edge of the roof and shook a rock out of his shoe. The rich navy of the night filled the sky now with the final glow of the sun seeping into the horizon.

"Bold claim to have when Ranboo said that you finished ALL of the chocolate glazed!" Tubbo retorted.

"Why aren't you yelling at Ranboo and Techno? They ate them too!"

"Don't hide behind excuses! You ate the last one! Now you have to face the consequences."

"Why are you punishing me? What was I supposed to do? Starve?"

"You wouldn't starve for your best friend? I'm disappointed in you."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "I'll just get you a donut tomorrow!"

"I bet Ranboo would starve for me," Tubbo flatly replied.

Ranboo's voice faintly sounded background, *"Please do not bring me into this."*

"Ranboo is one of the people who ate the donuts!" Tommy countered. "He just proved he would not starve for you!"

"Well, you know who is starving?! Me!" Tubbo continued with his voice becoming more and more dramatic, *"And now I'm going to die. Look what you've done, Tommy. I'm dying because of your actions. And if I die then I can't help you study biology. You're going to have a dead best friend and a failing grade in biology. I hope you can live with that. Oh wait. You*

won't because you'll never graduate and then you're going to be sad and poor and never find love because you'll be dirty and smelly and—

“For Prime’s sake,” Tommy pinched the bridge of his nose, “if I swing by Niki’s to see if she has any leftovers, will you calm down?”

“Depends...” Tommy could picture the smirk on Tubbo’s gaslighting face, *“...what will you do if there are no donuts?”*

“I will go back tomorrow and ask again,” Tommy grumbled.

Tubbo’s voice immediately cheered up. *“Perfect! And you’re going to do my laundry for the next month!”*

“Who the hell said I was—”

“Thanks, best friend! See you at the usual spot! Bye!” Tubbo interrupted before ending the call.

Tommy shook his head as he stuffed his phone back in his fanny pack. A breeze blew past him as he pushed up to his feet. He took a deep breath, allowing the chill air to fill his lungs, before twisting around and jumping to the next rooftop.

A few months ago, he would’ve needed to focus on controlling when he increased or decreased his gravity, making sure he had just enough momentum to move forward and not accidentally face plant on the street below. Now, his body glided through the air as if he had been doing this his entire life.

The wind whistled in his ears and Tommy’s mind began to wander. There weren’t many heroes that specialized in flying. He had seen a few heroes in other major cities who could fly around, but most of them were used as recuse teams. The gravel crackled under his soles as he ran, gaining momentum before launching off. The cold prickled his bare cheeks, but his powers hummed with warmth throughout the rest of his body. Tommy was reminded of the only person he knew that could fly. An image of Phil fanning out his black wings crossed his mind.

Then he remembered when even the idea of those wings made his chest tight. Those black wings. A pair of red Goggles. A sword. A purple cape. All things that used to twist his gut into dozens of knots.

And now Tommy wouldn’t spare them a second glance. Sometimes, they even brought him comfort. Most of the time.

The ship of Theseus would always look the same. No matter how many years passed, as long as someone cared about that dumb boat, the sails, the mast, the anchor, and the planks would all look exactly the same. Yet, as the people of Athens replaced each piece, as time flowed through the ship, it would become irrevocably different.

The ship would look like the original ship. And to the passing traveler, it would be the same.

But to the Athenians, to the ones who repaired the rotting pieces with their own hands, to the ones who cared, the ship of Theseus would be so much more. It gained so much by simply having a connection to others.

Just like the wings, the goggles, the sword, and the cape.

Just like Tommy.

If someone looked up to the rooftops of L'Manburg, they might catch a glimpse of the red-hooded vigilante. Most people would think he was the same illegal vigilante who caught car thieves and helped old ladies cross the street for the past few months. But to the ones who cared, they would notice that the vigilante was irrevocably different.

Tommy was Vigilante and Vigilante was Tommy. He was both. He would always be both. And he was okay with that. He had people who would change his rotting planks. They could help him be both.

He wasn't alone anymore—

Suddenly, cold washed over his whole body. His stomach dropped as he felt his powers waver for a second. His foot caught on the edge of a building and he tumbled onto the concrete.

“What the hell?” He groaned as he sat up. His palms stung as he dusted off his hands. Then he frowned as he gave himself a quick inspection, but he was fine. The abrupt cold vanished and his powers buzzed through his core like usual. Weird.

As he stood up, he raked his fingers through his hair. Maybe he couldn't completely go on auto-pilot when jumping across rooftops.

The sky was entirely covered in the rich navy without a cloud or moon in sight. However, in the city below, the streetlights were lit with a warm yellow as the headlights of cars sped past in a hazy blur. There were a few stores still with their lights on, but the sidewalk was deserted. Tommy recognized the bakery at the end of the street and jumped towards it.

His muscles heated up as his powers pulsed through them. He quickly floated through the sky, directing his gravity to anchor to the alleyway behind the bakery. The motion reminded him of a familiar feeling from earlier in the day. It was eerily similar to when he created an anti-gravity field to save Mr. Mittens.

He landed with a frown. He floated all the time! That was literally his power! Why was he so hung up on the fact he made a few more things float? He should be excited that he unlocked a new power! This was a good thing! It was incredible!

Tommy stared at his palms. He didn't feel very incredible. The last time he unlocked a new power... he was with Dream...

He forced the memory away. He had no desire to think about the city's Number One Asswipe. He sighed. Whatever the hell this was, he would deal with it later. He currently had

a different mission. He needed to acquire donuts or Tubbo was going to make his life a living hell. The last time Tommy ignored his best friend's demands Tubbo coded a virus that made his phone play Gangnam Style at full volume every hour on the hour. Somehow he even made it so that Tommy couldn't turn off his phone—

Suddenly, a voice cut through the alley, "What the hell are you doing?"

Tommy jumped and let out a super manly yell. He twisted around to see a familiar pair of red and blue glasses. With a trash bag slung over his shoulder and a smirk on his face, Jack continued, "Did you just squeal?"

"No! You need to get your ears checked!" Tommy argued. Then cleared his throat before continuing in his very real and not exaggerated deep voice, "I do not squeal."

"Sure..."

"I am a man! You could never scare me!"

Jack rolled his eyes and replied, "Why are you standing back here anyway? Also, this is a bag of trash, just as a reminder."

"I'm not here to fight you!"

"Listen, I'm just giving you the warning! You've destroyed it before."

"Not everything is about your bald head! I'm here to see Niki," Tommy admitted. "Is she still here?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't know... Maybe if you were nice to my bald head I could remember..."

Tommy groaned. "You know I can still beat you up. I've done it twice."

"Yeah, but I also know you don't beat up innocent civilians. And me and my bald head are very innocent... Also, I am not bald! I just have a buzz cut—"

Tommy threw his hands up, "Fine! Prime! I am sorry about your bald head. Where is Niki?"

"I'm not— ugh, whatever—" Jack nodded towards the back door, "she's inside."

"Great!" Tommy exclaimed. As he passed Jack, he went on, "Thanks, king! I'm glad I don't have to beat you up anymore."

Jack raised an eyebrow. "Bold of you to assume that you would be able to."

"Oh yeah? I've wiped the floor with you both times we fought!"

"Neither of those was fair! If we had a proper fight, you wouldn't stand a chance!"

"Are you asking for a rematch, baldy?" A grin crawled across Tommy's face.

Jack turned his back to Tommy and walked to the trash bin. “Unlike you, I don’t have time to randomly fight people in bakeries.”

Tommy’s grin flipped upside down. “You were the one who was robbing a bakery!”

“Allegedly.”

“Not allegedly! You tried to rob a bakery!”

The trash bag landed in the bin with a *thud* before Jack replied, “Aren’t *you* an illegal vigilante?”

Tommy opened his mouth to reply but then hesitated. Then he went on, “Allegedly.”

Jack glanced back with a smile. “That’s what I thought.”

“You’re a dick.”

Jack let out a laugh as he headed out towards the street. “See you around, Vigilante. It’s nice to have you around again.”

The same unusual sensation as when the people applauded him appeared again. Tommy’s words stumbled out awkwardly, “Oh, um, thanks!”

As Jack disappeared around the corner, a thought popped into Tommy’s mind.

He thought, *Huh. He noticed that I was gone.*

—

The fluorescent lights hummed above the metal counters, ovens, and fridges as he entered the back of the kitchen, but there was no sign of Niki. Tommy released the handle and the door slammed closed. He winced as the sound echoed through the room.

“Are you okay, Jack?” Niki’s voice came from the front. She entered the kitchen as she started, “Weren’t you headed home—”

She stopped herself when her eyes landed on Tommy. He spread his arms out happily and exclaimed, “Niki! I was in the neighborhood and wanted to pop in to say hi!”

Niki raised an eyebrow. “You just wanted to say ‘hi’? Nothing else?”

“Well... I was wondering one other thing... but it’s totally fine if it’s not possible... I was thinking that... maybe... potentially... only if you want...”

“Tommy.”

“Alright! Alright! I forgot to leave a donut for Tubbo so I was wondering if you had anything I could give to him! But I also wanted to say hi! I promise! I didn’t see you this morning since I was in a rush!”

Niki shook her head as she softly chuckled. “I am starting to get concerned about Tubbo’s and your dependencies on these donuts.”

“Please, Niki!” Tommy put his hands together and begged, “I’ll take anything you have off your hands! Tubbo’s going to make me do his laundry if I don’t bring something back.”

“Oh, I know. Ranboo called me earlier in the afternoon,” Niki pushed past the kitchen door and grabbed something off the front counter. One second later, she came back with a box of a dozen donuts. “He asked if I could save some chocolate-glazed for you guys. He had a feeling you might drop in.”

Tommy ran up with a smile. “Ranboo needs to mind his own business, but also thank Prime that weirdo doesn’t.”

Niki handed him the box and he lifted the top to see three rows of rings of golden fried dough, shining with a glazed chocolate top. He took a deep breath in of the sweet yeast aroma. There were specks of chocolate lining the edge of the box as if Niki had directly put these donuts into the box after frosting instead of grabbing them from the case...

“Did you just make these?” Tommy asked.

“Uh... if I say no will you believe me?” Niki answered with a guilty smile.

“Niki! This is too much! I can’t—” he tried to push the donuts back to her, but she shook her head.

“I wanted to make them for you! I promise it was my pleasure. I’m so happy that you like my pastries so much that you would come all the way here to pick up more for your friends.”

“At least let me pay you!” Tommy put the donuts down and started to riffle through his fanny pack. “I have cash in here somewhere...”

“Don’t worry about it,” Niki replied. “Consider it as a gift for saving the world. Thank you for that by the way.”

Tommy looked up. He joked about saving the world all the time but, this was the first time someone had actually *said* ‘thank you’ to him.

His body couldn’t handle all the praise he received today. He felt like he was going to throw up. He dropped his eyes to the ground. Everyone was being too nice. He hadn’t even done anything special. He softly replied, “I’m not sure if I deserve a thank you.”

“What? Why not? Dream might’ve taken all the credit, but you did all the work!”

A chill passed over him and Tommy crossed his arms, still avoiding eye contact. “I was the one who brought the Egg here in the first place. I was just fixing the mistake I made.”

“What are you talking about?” Niki’s stern voice forced him to look up. His gut twisted at the thought that he had upset her. He started to open his mouth to apologize, but Niki continued, “From what you told me, didn’t Dream force you to do that though?”

“Yes, but—”

“To me, it sounds like the whole Egg thing is on him. He was supposed to protect you. You were his assistant. He was the one in charge. It’s not your fault he failed.”

He found himself wanting to protest. It was like when Phil opened up to him about his family. He assumed that he didn’t deserve their kindness. He was the one who was impulsive, emotional, and uncontrollable. His life was filled with problems because he was the problem.

...Was he though?

“Fuck...” Tommy rubbed the bridge of his nose. This ‘healing’ shit was giving him a headache.

“Are you okay?” Niki asked, worry making her eyebrows crease together.

“Yeah!” He nodded. “I’m just not used to people being nice to me... okay, wait, that sounded really sad. I meant to say that I just...well...um...” He threw his hands up in defeat. “I don’t know. Everything has been so weird.”

Niki leaned back on the counter and asked, “Like a good weird or...?”

“Good weird!” He reassured her. “It’s definitely a good weird. This all has been new for me. The past few weeks were some of the best weeks of my entire life. I have a job that I love. I get to help people around the city. I’m not even failing any of my classes! For once... I feel balanced.”

He sighed as he shifted his gaze to the ground. “I’m happy. I really am. And I want to be happy all the time...”

“...but you can’t,” Niki finished his sentence. Tommy nodded. She went on, “Did something happen?”

A dejected laugh escaped Tommy’s throat. “That’s just it! Nothing happened! Everything is going great! I’m supposed to be enjoying it!”

His voice went quiet. “Instead, there’s something in me that’s dreading something I don’t even know about yet. It’s like I’m constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop. For some reason, I can’t convince myself that the good things will last. I think... I think I’m scared that I’m going to mess up again and...”

Niki gently placed her hand on Tommy’s shoulder, making him look up. She softly smiled as she spoke, “You’ve been through a lot. More than any person—let alone a teenager—should go through. And for most of this time, you’ve been holding so many responsibilities all by yourself. But it’s different now. You might still have some residual anxieties, but I want you

to remember that you're not alone in this anymore. Whether or not that other shoe ever drops, you have people who care about you no matter what."

Tommy knew she was right. His brain knew she was right. Time and time again his friends showed that they cared, that they *genuinely* cared about *him*. Yet, he began to reply, "But—"

"Stop," she interrupted, putting her hand up. She paused for a moment with a serious look. Then said, "Also you said butt."

His brain short-circuited, slowly registering what she had said. Then all at once, the tension in his shoulders melted away and he laughed.

She lightly slapped his shoulder and went on, "I can't believe that actually worked."

"I'm a simple guy," Tommy shrugged.

Niki chuckled and said, "I'm happy to hear you're doing well," she then lifted the box of donuts and placed it in his hands before giving him a wink, "You're doing great, Vigilante."

"I'm trying my best... but thanks, Niki. It really means a lot."

She nodded before saying, "You said butt again."

"You can't call me out every single time!" Tommy protested.

"Maybe stop saying butt," she brushed off, but the corners of her mouth pulled at a smile.

"At this point, you've said it more than me!"

"Fine, I'll use a different word. Get your ass out of here before Tubbo kicks it to the curb. Isn't he currently waiting for a special delivery?" Niki raised her eyebrow.

"Shit!" Tommy spun around and ran towards the back door. As he pushed it open he called out, "See you later!"

Niki shouted back, "Hold onto the donuts! I don't have any more extras!"

Tommy secured the donuts with both his hands as he bounded up towards the rooftops. He didn't want to mess them up.

However, even if he did mess up, things would be okay. He would be okay.

—

When he finally reached the meeting point, the sky was pitch black. His eyes had adjusted to the darkness as he was coming over since the streetlamps in this part of Logstedshire had been out of order for the past two blocks.

He was the first one there for once. Feeling a bit suspicious, he double-checked if this was the correct roof. He leaned over the ledge and examined his surroundings. He was on the building with white window shades on the corner of Netherrack Lane and Red Stone Grove. This was the right one. His phone buzzed in his hand and two messages popped up.

TUBBO: Running late! Need to swing by the lab!

WILBUR: Heading out now be there in five so you'll probably be getting there at the same times as us

Tommy rolled his eyes as he switched his phone to silent. He couldn't wait to rub it in Wilbur's face that he was the first one here. And he even had brought donuts. On time.

He set the box down and then sat on the ledge of the roof. His legs dangled as he observed the twinkling lights of Central L'manburg. It was interesting how different the parts of the city were depending on their location. Hundreds of thousands of volts of electricity illuminate Central's billboards and screens versus the pathetic glow of Logstedshire's lamps. Two places that were only a few miles from each other. It was interesting, but not surprising. Tommy didn't feel surprised very often these days.

So much about the past year made way more sense the few days after he got his memories back. As he remembered more and more, there was a moment where he wondered if he'd revert to yearning for Dream's approval.

Revert to destroying his mind and body to prove himself worthy. Revert to blindly following anyone who threw a speck of attention in his direction.

Luckily, Tommy was still disgusted every time he saw the mask with a smile plastered on the walls of the train. Dream was a psychopath for doing something as fucked up as taking away someone's memories. But he also couldn't deny the fact that Dream was the catalyst to quitting his job. If Dream hadn't taken those memories, Tommy would still be his assistant. Maybe Dream would have made him his apprentice.

Tommy sighed. The memories didn't change his beliefs. Dream couldn't take those away from him. He wanted to help people. No one could take that away.

He unclipped his fanny pack and slightly decreased its gravity. It felt nice to use the power under his skin. He gave it a small tap from the bottom and watched it float up and then down like it was suspended in water. He played around with the floating bag, trying to keep his mind from wandering.

Instead, the fanny pack reminded him of Mr. Mittens, suspended in the air with nowhere to go.

"Fuck..." He swore under his breath. He snatched the pack out of the air, returned it to its original state, and threw it behind him. He wasn't even sure if he could do it ever again. Then again, if he could do it again, what would happen if he couldn't control it? He groaned, faceplanting into his hands.

It was just a fluke , he thought. A one-time thing.

Yet the other side of his mind berated him with doubts. The last time he learned something about his powers an evil plant almost took over the world. He turned around and stared at the fanny pack a few feet away. His powers buzzed behind his palms.

Maybe he should make sure that it was a one-time time. He couldn't do it on command. If he couldn't do it then he could just ignore it. Then he could cross that bridge later. But right now, he just needed to confirm.

He pushed up to his feet and outstretched his hands in front of him. He focused on the pack, imagining it lifting into the air. A warm pressure spread through his arms as his hands shook. He couldn't just transfer his power to the pack he needed to imbed into the space around the pack. He began to focus on the area of the pack. His chest hummed with heat as he willed his powers out of his body and into space, into gravity.

And then, the fanny pack lifted off the ground.

It was barely hovering, but it was hovering.

Following the suit of the pack, a few surrounding loose pebbles floated along with it. He had done it. In this small area of the roof, Tommy was in charge of the gravity. He was the one in control.

A smile spread on his face.

This was it. He had complete power over the space. He had ***power. He could finally be powerf—***

Suddenly, a puff of purple particles exploded next to the fanny pack.

It dropped to the ground as Tommy stumbled backward, flailing his arms to keep from falling off the roof. "Shi—"

"Sorry! I know we're late—" Tubbo started to say as he stepped out of the flurries with Ranboo beside him, but then paused as his eyes landed on his roommate. "Uh, what are you doing?"

Tommy regained his balance and exclaimed, "Nothing! I was just waiting for you!" Abruptly, his whole body quivered as a cold washed over his body.

"Are you okay?" Ranboo asked.

"I'm fine!" Tommy countered, rubbing his arms to try to create some heat. He would explain the new ability later. The dark spots in his vision warned that this was not the time to demonstrate. Instead, he continued, "Did you bring any blankets or shit? You made me wait in the freezing cold!"

"Your suit is temperature controlled," Tubbo stated flatly. "That material makes it basically impossible for you to overheat or freeze."

“Freeze deez n–” A soft cloth smacked him in the face.

“I brought some,” Ranboo replied as he pulled out another from the duffle bag beside him.

Tubbo laughed and Tommy flicked off both of them. Then he said, “You are horrible friends. Maybe if you were good friends I would share my donuts.”

“Why would you be sharing *my* donuts?” Tubbo asked, storming over.

Tommy whisked the box off the ground and held it over his head. “How can they be yours if you can’t reach– OW!”

Tubbo kicked him in the shin. He buckled over as Tubbo snatched the box and replied, “Thank you so much, Tommy. It almost makes up for the fact that you forgot about your best friend this morning.” He narrowed his eyes. “*Almost.* ”

“I am not doing your laundry!” Tommy snapped.

“He’s right, Tubbo,” Wilbur’s voice came from above. The roommates looked across the roof to see Phil, Techno, and Wilbur land. He continued, “Don’t make him do your laundry.”

“Thank you,” Tommy nodded. It was nice to know that someone valued his–

“He doesn’t even do his own. He admitted it to me this morning,” Wilbur finished.

“The hell?!” Tommy glared at Wilbur’s mocking smirk.

Then Techno chimed in, “I bet he doesn’t even know how to do laundry.”

“I know how–!”

Ranboo patted his shoulder. “It’s okay, Tommy. Lots of people don’t know how to do laundry.”

“What–?”

“Do you need us to show you how to do it, mate?” Phil joined in, but he was terrible at holding a straight face.

Tommy pushed off Ranboo's hand and said, “You are all terrible people. Only sad and insecure and balding people would prey on an epic cool super strong and incredible man like me. One day you will languish in regret when I am gone from your lives.”

“Define languish,” Wilbur raised an eyebrow.

“Languish deez n–”

“Sometimes I think it would have been better if we let the Egg destroy the world,” Wilbur went on. The rest of Tommy’s friends murmured in agreement.

“I hate you all,” Tommy huffed. Then he twisted around and laid down on the roof. He stared at the black sky, sprinkled with specks of light. “None of you are allowed to be on this roof anymore. Leave my roof.”

Footsteps shuffled beside him, but Tommy kept his eyes on the stars. He began to follow the constellations like the world’s largest dot-to-dot. He connected the glowing points to spot the Big Dipper—Tubbo would correct him and say that it was technically a part of the Ursa Major, but Tommy wouldn’t let him have the satisfaction today— then he connected the image of ‘The Hunter’ constellation.

He was in the middle of forming Taurus when Techno asked, “Tommy, have you found any yet?”

“Of course I have,” Tommy huffed. “Have *you* found any?”

“Before you enter this pissing contest, I need to remind you that Techno’s power is literally knowing shit,” Wilbur remarked.

“The only piss you should be worried about is the piss you’re going to find in your shoes,” Tommy snapped.

“Have you ever had a coherent thought in your lifetime?” Wilbur replied.

“At least I still have a long life ahead of me, unlike you and your brittle bones and lack of hair.”

“Your concern for my hairline is interesting since yours is quickly catching up to mine.”

“My hairline is exceptional! You wish your hairline was like mine!”

“Your forehead could be used as a landing pad.”

“ *Your* forehead is competing with billboards for advertisements!”

“Makes sense since people actually like looking at my face.”

“Your face is ugly and gross and—”

Ranboo wondered out loud, “When does this become relaxing?”

“Usually after Tommy passes out,” Tubbo replied.

Tommy huffed, “Hey!”

“And how long does that take?” Phil followed up.

“Not too long if I start describing the physics of stars being burning balls of gas,” Tubbo answered.

“That is not true!” Tommy bunched his brows together with a deep frown.

“Would the myth of Orion work?” Techno offered.

“It should,” Tubbo confirmed. “Learning puts him straight to sleep.”

Tommy crossed his arms. “You are all terrible people.”

“Yeah, but not as terrible as Orion,” Techno continued.

“Well, if this guy is anything like any of the other myth dudes I’ve heard about I wouldn’t be surprised,” Tommy said. “Is this the guy who had sex with his mom?”

“No. That was Oedipus. That guy just had a bad life. This is Orion. The Greeks named a constellation after him and his myth. You see those three bright stars in a line? That line forms his belt and then from—”

“Ohh... you’re talking about ‘The Hunter’!” Tommy exclaimed, pointing at the belt of glowing points. “Ha! I already know that one!”

Then Ranboo asked, “Wait, if Orion’s so horrible then why did they name a constellation after him?”

“Constellations have different names depending on the culture,” Techno answered. “Orion is just what the Greeks called this cluster of stars since they reminded them of the image of a hunter. And Orion was one of the best hunters in Greek mythology. But then one day he decided to declare he was going to kill every animal in the world.”

“Every animal? Damn, that’s as bad as that Oedi-piss dude,” Tommy noted.

“Are you saying killing animals is as bad as having sex with your mom?” Tubbo interjected.

Tommy snapped back, “Both are bad! Why are people making myths about this shit?!”

“They weren’t myths to the ancient Greeks. Those people believed these stories were their history. But they also told them as lessons,” Wilbur replied.

“And those are the two biggest problems for Greek people? Really? Murdering animals and incest?!”

“They more so had to do with hubris,” Wilbur continued, “but also yes. The ancient Greeks had a lot of problems.”

Tommy nodded. “Now that’s something I can relate to.”

“I’m assuming someone stopped Orion before he murdered the world’s animals,” Ranboo continued, steering the conversation back to its point.

“Oh yeah. The goddess of Earth, Gaea, sent a giant scorpion to kill him. After he lost, Zeus turned him into a constellation,” Techno responded.

“Damn, death by giant scorpion... that’s fucked up,” Tommy would never wish a giant scorpion death on his worst enemy. Maybe on Dream, but that’s it.

“Zeus didn’t just do him dirty by putting him in the night sky,” Wilbur added. “After he turned Orion into the constellation he then turned the scorpion into one. However, he put them on opposite sides of the sky so as the scorpion rises, Orion flees and sets below the horizon; fixing Orion into an endless losing battle in the night sky... But that’s just one interpretation. There are a few variations of the story of how Orion got its name.”

Tommy stared at Orion. The constellation shined a bit brighter in contrast to the other stars. It was like it could tell their focus was on it. He wondered what the story would be like if Orion never made the mistake of threatening the animals of the world. All it took was one mistake and now his legacy was being chased by a giant scorpion forever. Did Orion even realize he had made the mistake that would cement his ending? Did he even have a choice? Or was he destined to make that mistake? Was Orion always meant to be stuck in the stars?

“I don’t know if our destiny is set in stone. Anything can happen. But let me ask you: who is going to tell your story? Because it’s probably not going to be you.”

He rolled his eyes at the memory of Wilbur’s dramatic teacher monologue about a poem. He hated that he genuinely learned something from that class.

Tommy wasn’t a myth. His story was not a cautionary tale. His story was not completed yet.

He broke away from the sky and turned his head to see his friends lying beside him on the roof. On his right, Tubbo was silently nudging Ranboo and pointing at the sky while on his left, Wilbur was pulling out a guitar from his bag. Besides him, Techno fidgeted with his knife and Phil had his eyes closed, arms crossed behind his head.

Even if this was his ending, Tommy had no problem leaving his legacy in their hands.

A shiver shook his body. The cold air finally made its way through his hoodie, but it felt nice of his faintly aching joints.

Destiny was bullshit anyway.

The only thing Tommy was destined for was to be Tommy. And Tommy was whoever *he* wanted to be. It was his choice. It was always his choice. And he chose to be here with his friends in Logstedshire, the best place to see the stars.

Techno then continued, “At the end of the day, it’s like Tubbo said. They’re just giant burning balls of gas.”

“Balls of gas with cores that are made up of a soup of electrons and protons that are stripped from hydrogen atoms or also known as plasma,” Tubbo added to flex for no other reason than to show he was a giant nerd.

Tommy snorted, “You said balls.”

“For a moment, I thought he might’ve actually knocked out and we could’ve had some peace,” Wilbur stated followed by a few guitar strums.

“Your mid guitar playing would have woken me up anyway,” Tommy replied, sitting up and shooting him a sneer.

“You mean this mid guitar playing?” Wilbur raised an eyebrow before his fingers glided over the strings and a gentle melody encompassed entire the roof. It was light and gentle, each note perfectly placed. Tommy tried to hide his awe behind an exaggerated scowl. But he wasn’t sure how well it was working. He couldn’t deny it: the song was a lovely addition to the chilly rooftop.

After a few measures, Wilbur paused to glance at Tommy. He wanted to slap the smug look off his face. Wilbur was so cracked at the guitar because the asshole cheated with his powers. It was literally impossible for the dickwad to play a stray note unless he wanted to.

However, Tommy did not take back his comment. Instead, he said, “Barely mid. Keep practicing and maybe you can play in front of people.”

“And what are you guys? Are you not ‘people’?” Wilbur raised an eyebrow.

Tommy shook his head. “We like you so we don’t count, but other people will berate you and hate you.”

Wilbur tilted his head. Then A smirk crossed his face. “Did you just admit to liking me? Are you saying we are friends, Tommy Innit?”

“I’d rather eat Ranboo’s shoe than ever say anything about your dumb ugly forehead beside that you’re barely tolerable and I hate your sweater vests.”

“Please do not eat my shoe,” Ranboo chimed in. “I need it.”

Wilbur dropped his smile. “Wait, you don’t like my sweater vests?”

“Why can’t you wear sleeves like a normal person?” Tommy countered.

“I can wear vests and sweaters! They have different purposes!”

“Vests are useless!”

“Says the guy who thinks having more than three pants is useless!”

“I wear a uniform! I don’t want to have seven khaki pants in my closet!”

“No one is telling you to buy seven—”

“Why don’t you just buy deez—”

A loud beeping cut him off. It was an alert for the police scanner.

Tommy instinctually whipped out his phone, but it wasn't the source of the sound. He had silenced all his alerts earlier.

"Sorry! Sorry!" Tubbo apologized as he fished out his phone from his bag and clicked off the alarm.

"Didn't we say we were going to take a break tonight?" Tommy questioned. This was the first night with clear skies in weeks that the six of them were free at the same time. As much as he itched to jump into action, his friends came out here because *he* asked them to. He couldn't ditch them to go punch criminals. Or maybe it was another cat in a tree. Tommy hoped it wasn't the latter.

"We did..." Tubbo exchanged a guilty look with Ranboo. Tommy furrowed his brows together, switching his glare back and forth between his roommates.

Ranboo continued, actively avoiding eye contact, "We really appreciate that you brought us here. It's been cool to see the stars like this!"

"Yeah! Like they're super great!" Tubbo remarked. "You know as well as me that I always love seeing them!"

His roommates glanced at each other again, as if they were silently deciding which one was going to stomp on Tommy's heart. Luckily for them, Tommy was now an expert at deciphering his roommates' lousy poker faces.

He crossed his arms and said, "I sense that there's going to be a giant 'but' now. And it's not the funny kind of 'but'."

"It's not that we *don't* want to stay and look at the stars!" Ranboo insisted.

"Speak for yourself," Tubbo scoffed. "Honestly, it was great for ten minutes and I'm getting bored now."

"Well, I'm sorry I didn't realize that you have the attention span of a tablet toddler!" Tommy answered. He ignored that his powers were tingling under his skin again. He turned towards the rest of the group and asked, "Are you guys bored too?"

Phil stared at the ground as Wilbur let out an awkward laugh. Techno shrugged before saying, "If it helps, I was bored before I came here."

"What the hell, guys!" Tommy threw his hands around as he spoke, "This was supposed to be like a relaxing and chill night with no stress! Emphasis on the '*no stress*' part! People don't go fight criminals when they want to hang out and de-stress!"

"Most people aren't illegal vigilantes though," Wilbur answered as he placed his guitar down and picked up his bag. He pulled a pair of red goggles from the front pocket.

The next thing he knew, Techno and Ranboo were slipping on their masks and Phil and Tubbo were unpacking laptops from their bags. Tommy stressed, "Seriously?! Did you plan for this?!"

Wilbur secured his goggles on his face with a grin. He replied, “Come on, Tommy. The stars aren’t going anywhere.”

“The alert says that the break-in is only a few meters from here,” Tubbo commented as he adjusted his headset.

His powers were making his fingertips pulse now. Tommy rolled his eyes, trying to suppress a smile. He pulled out his mask and adjusted it over his eyes. “Only for a little bit. Then we go back to relaxing.”

“Sure, Tommy...” Wilbur’s dumb face still had that smirk on it. “As if you need any more relaxing since you’re constantly late to work.”

“I’m on time! I’m just not ten minutes early to everything like a weirdo like you!” Tommy snapped.

“Hey Tubbo, where are we headed?” Ranboo asked as Wilbur and Tommy continued bickering.

“What are you even relaxing for?!”

“I need to relax because you’re always stressing me out!”

Tubbo smiled, “We’re in luck. It seems like there’s been a hit on the convenience store one street over. Just head in that direction,” and he pointed to the building to Tommy’s right.

“When’s the last time you even patrolled, old man?” Tommy called out before sprinting in that direction. He landed on the next rooftop just as Ranboo materialized next to him with Wilbur and Techno holding onto him. “You think you’ll be able to keep up?”

“What the hell do you think we did at the Academy?” Wilbur answered.

Tommy booed and gave a thumbs down as an incredible comeback.

Then Tubbo’s voice sounded in his ear, “*You should be looking for two men in a black ski mask.*”

Each of them walked to a different side of the roof and checked the premises. Wilbur’s voice rang out from the opposite side, “There are a few potential escape vehicles, but they are empty. No one is on the street either.”

Ranboo’s voice followed, “No sign of anyone here either.”

And Techno grunted, “Nope.”

Tommy looked over his edge and stared into an empty alleyway. He began to say, “Maybe these guys already—”

Suddenly the creaking of a heavy door reverberated throughout the alley. The door slammed closed and two deep laughs followed. Tommy watched as two men dressed in black lug

dufflebags out of the building.

“Damn! That was fucking easy!” the man on the left scoffed.

“I told you that none of the heroes give a shit about Logstedshire!” the other man replied.

Well, he's not technically wrong, Tommy thought before launching himself over the ledge.

He silently floated down and landed right behind the thieves. They were nothing out of the ordinary, probably two dumbasses who wanted to make a quick buck. He couldn't rule out if they had weapons and it wasn't clear what was in the dufflebags. His powers gave him goosebumps and a smile spread across his face.

“We might even have time to hit up the place on 75th Street!” commented one of the men.

“Oh, which one is that? I haven't heard of it,” Tommy asked in a loud voice. “Is it a good place to rob?”

“Well yeah, its the one— wait,” The men whipped around, taken aback by the new member of the conversation.

“If you had to rate it 1 through 10 on how robbable it was, what would you give it?” Tommy went on.

“What the fuck!” One of the criminals cursed.

“There are no heroes scheduled to patrol Logstedshire for another 2 hours!” The other shouted.

Tommy looked around and then exclaimed, “I don't see any heroes so I guess you're right! Thanks for the tip! I have no desire to run into those asswipes.”

The man on the left dropped his bag and unsheathed a pocket knife. He pointed it at Tommy and yelled, “Fucking move any closer and I'll slice you open!”

Tommy held his hands up in mock-defense. “Shit, man. I was just curious about that place on 75th. You seemed really excited to go rob it! Not to mention you don't really look like the murder type. Those are not the bags you use if you want to dispose of a body.”

“Shut the fuck up!” The man with the knife shouted. “I'm going to end you!”

“Dude, let's just run! What if the heroes sent him?” his partner countered.

Tommy shook his head. “Oh no, I'd rather have you stab me than associate me with those dickwads.”

“I said don't fucking move! Let me just fucking think!” The armed criminal prodded the air with his weapon.

The other criminal slightly tilted his head though. He asked, "If you're not a hero, then who the hell are you?"

Tommy smiled.

"Who are we?"

A loud *crack* shook the ground just as a flurry of purple particles exploded behind the men. With their eyes basically bulging out of their masks, the men twisted back and fourth, finding themselves surrounded.

"We're just your friendly neighborhood vigilantes."

Chapter End Notes

Over a year ago, I had such intense brain rot of a superhero au of fictional characters based on a Minecraft server that I forced myself to do something I never thought I would do: write fanfiction.

A lot has happened since then. With the world. With people. Even with me. I can't say I'm the same person I was when I started. But I'm not entirely different. I'm her... but I also now have a 168,694 words fanfic.

I'll be honest I don't even watch many streamers anymore, but they brought me comfort in a time when I didn't have much to be excited about. The characters in this story may share the names and some personalities of characters from a Minecraft server (that may have gone down in infamy), but I like to think that they've grown beyond just alternates of their original counterparts. From the start, I always thought of this story as an original piece; you could not know a single thing about Minecraft and still understand it. It's a superhero story, there's not much else to be said. So I'm excited to finish their story in Vol. 2, even if I'm not technically in the streamer fandom anymore.

However, something that never changed was the responses when sharing my silly little words. Even with my inconsistent posting schedule, there were people still excited. I can never thank you enough for just reading some of my story, let alone 168,694 words of it. Thank you to everyone who has left a comment and kudos, I always adored seeing your reactions and thoughts. You guys are hilarious. Also thank you to the people who silently read my story, the guests who have no username or account and just lurked. As a chronic lurker, I completely understand. Thanks for sticking around. And to those reading this in the future, I hope I was able to give you a great story you could binge-read. ;)

There are a lot of issues in the world right now. It is rough to be constantly bombarded with tragedy over and over again. I only ever wish peace and ease to everyone who is suffering. But one of the major themes of this story is to fight for all people, not just a select few. So please keep on being informed about the world around you and educate

yourself. You have more power than you know. But also as much as it is important to keep on fighting for those who are suffering, it's important to rest and take care of yourself. Remember that this story is one of hope and change. And stories are a reflection of reality.

I'm beyond grateful to every single one of you for giving me the confidence to keep going. And I'm beyond blessed to have people support me (aka a total stranger on the internet) and her silly little words and her silly little drawings. Thank you for being here. Thank you for reading. And thank you for closing your eyes when you saw a misspelling.

Hope you have a good rest of your day and I'll see you in the next one <3

Volume 2

So it's been a few months since I "finished" this fic and oof a lot has happened since then hasn't it?

I'll just get to it: I will not be writing a sequel to this fic. Even before everything came out about a certain British streamer, I had kind of lost the motivation to write the second arc of this story. I wish I could just spend all day writing for y'all, but unfortunately I have to have a "job" and earn "money" and that's a whole thing.

I learned a lot from writing this fic, but the biggest thing I learned was that I want to write something original. To be honest, this is an original story and all I really borrowed were names. Because of this, I am highly considering rewriting this story with my own original characters. I feel like I could do even more when not constricted to a certain fandom and characters. And now with what we know about a certain British streamer I no longer feel comfortable writing about him in a positive light.

Because of these reasons I will most likely be deleting this fic in the next few months. I know a lot of people liked reading this fic and if you'd like to keep this original story please go ahead and download it and keep it for yourself! It brings me so much joy that people enjoyed this fic so much :)

Now you're probably asking: What about Volume 2? How else could you have traumatized Tommy for another whole arc?

Even though I may reuse these plot points, I would love to share with you my thoughts about how I would've wrapped up Tommy's story.

Now to be honest I only ever had like a general plot idea of how I wanted volume 2 to go. I was pretty bad with planning out exact chapters so I don't know how I would've totally connected all these ideas but I would've whipped up something. Idk if it would be good, but when was I ever aiming to write something "good"? This whole thing was just me writing for myself lol.

So here are a bunch of scenes I imagined in my head without really any good transitions between them :) by the end it will be more of me just explaining the plot and less dialogue and action so please forgive the brain dump

Alright so let's just pick up where we left off:

Everything was great and nothing else could go wrong in Tommy's life.

Yes, he had the tiny problem where he could barely sleep because he felt like he was overflowing with energy but that was no big deal. He could simply burn off that extra energy by doing more vigilante stuff. Of course, of course.

And for a while, it worked. It seemed like Tommy was actually able to juggle being Vigilante, work, and school. Tubbo and Ranboo helped him with daily patrols, Techno and Phil kept him busy with work, and W made sure he turned in his school work (or at least he tried). Even Dream stayed out of his way.

Tommy slowly learned about the new abilities he gained after opening the portal. Before he could only control the gravity of things if he touched them, but now he was able to control the gravity of entire areas and all the things inside of them. This great new skill was very useful in stopping runaway thieves or helping civilians get to safety. Sometimes he could even stop entire cars from flipping over!

After so many people tried to control every aspect of his life, Tommy was finally able to feel something he hadn't felt in a long time. He had almost forgotten it. He felt free. He felt unstoppable. He felt powerful.

So it didn't really matter that sometimes, after using his powers a painful cold shook his body so badly that he couldn't move. The worst was when his friends would question his actions. When they doubted his powers Tommy felt conflicted. He was trying his best! Couldn't they see that?

Not to mention, who were they to decide how Tommy used his powers? So what if he became a little too rough with criminals? So what if he crumpled their car like a soda can as they crawled away in fear? So what if he shattered the arm of the criminal who was about to shoot Ranboo?

He saved Ranboo! He had to do it! He had just saved his friend so of course he was going to smile as he watched the man who almost hurt his friend writhe in pain.

However, when Tommy turned around, Ranboo didn't share Tommy's smile.

It was odd. Tommy recognized Ranboo's expression. It was the same expression he wore when Dream placed his hand on his shoulder or when the Egg influenced Tubbo to shoot Tommy. The fear swimming in his eyes should've been reserved for a monster. But instead, this expression was directed at *him*.

Tommy's smile dropped. Maybe he was in shock. Maybe he was confused. Tommy took a step forward as he reached a hand out to his friend.

Ranboo flinched.

Suddenly, it dawned on him. Ranboo was not in shock. Ranboo was not confused. Ranboo was *afraid of him*.

Tommy tried to choke out an explanation, but his words were lost to the buzzing filling his mind. And if on cue, his hand began to shake with a cold burning behind his skin. He barely registered when Ranboo finally broke eye contact and pushed past him towards the criminal. Anger flared in his chest for a moment as his friend went to the aid of a man who was trying to kill him not even a minute ago. But then Tommy's gaze landed on the man's arm. Tommy

had not just simply knocked the gun out of his hand. The gun laid shattered beyond repair right next to an arm that matched.

Shattered beyond repair.

The buzz of his mind became louder as he watched the man's blood fill the new cracks in the asphalt. Bile began to crawl up his throat. However, he dug his nails into his palms.

The cutting chill made him shake, but there was something else there too. A terrible thought that kept floating to the top of his throbbing head. He didn't even want to acknowledge it for the fear that it would make him puke right there and then. But there was no denying it. It could not be ignored no matter how badly Tommy wanted to. For a moment, as he used his powers to crush a man's arm into something unrecognizable, *Tommy enjoyed it*.

Thankfully he was pulled away from his warring thoughts by Ranboo gripping his arm.

"Go home," An uncharacteristic sternness lined his voice as if he was scolding a child. "*Now.*"

Tommy opened his mouth to say something, but then he realized there was another reason why his ears were ringing.

"What the hell is happening?!" Tubbo's voice cut in. *"Why is no one replying to me?! Tommy?! Ranboo?! If someone doesn't say something right now, I'm calling Phil."*

His voice was useless as Ranboo replied robotically, "We're fine, Tubbo. Everything is fine."

The man in a pool of blood would debate that statement if he wasn't too busy screaming.

"But your vitals are—"

Ranboo interrupted, "No time to explain. Heading back now. Cutting off coms."

"What? Don't—!"

Ranboo ripped the communicator out of Tommy's ear. He then pulled his own out and shoved them both in Tommy's pocket. However, instead of teleporting the two of them back to their dorm, his friend turned away.

Tommy was frozen as Ranboo grabbed the criminal's single intact arm. Instantly, the two of them vanished in a flurry of purple particles.

Only when he was alone in the alley did his body allow him to move.

He emptied his stomach onto the asphalt. The image of an arm without a body burned into his memories.

—

Tommy was struggling and it was pretty obvious.

He spent all his time trying to quell the rampant energy flowing through his body. He became more and more unfocused and distant. He would still go on patrols, but when he would go with Ranboo there was an unspoken tension. Even in daily life it seemed like Ranboo would be avoiding him at every moment, never speaking more than a few words to him. Tubbo tried to reassure him by saying Ranboo was just stressed with school, but Tommy knew the truth.

He accidentally made cars and trucks float and then suddenly sent them crashing back to Earth or accidentally flattened a lamppost when jumping off of it. Luckily, no one was hurt during these incidents, but that didn't negate the fact that Tommy couldn't control his powers anymore.

It also didn't help that everytime he used his powers, it felt like his body was being doused in serotonin. Of course he preferred the warmth that radiated in his core over the piercing cold that cut into his skin whenever he suppressed his powers. What type of monster liked crushing everything under the weight of gravity? What type of monster loved the feeling of being so strong that he could make buildings crumble in an instant? What type of monster adored the power to level the world into dust?

His body ached so badly to release the power trapped within that it was only a matter of time when Tommy's guilt would not be able to hold the floodgates closed. Going out to be Vigilante helped relieve the pressure for the time being, but no matter Tommy tried to convince himself, it would never be enough. Everyday more and more power swelled inside of him. With each passing moment his mind became more muddled with increasingly more intrusive thoughts.

But Tommy couldn't simply tell his friends that he was a ticking time bomb. The last time a friend of his was involved, Ranboo was forced to clean his mess. Tommy couldn't let that happen again. He couldn't let any of them get involved. These were Tommy's powers so these were Tommy's problems to solve.

Even though he was clear about wanting to work on himself independently, Tommy found himself surrounded by Tubbo, Ranboo, and W right before he was about to go for a patrol.

"Why don't you sit down?" offered W.

Tommy crossed his arms, energy vibrating beneath his skin. "You said this was going to be a short talk."

"It is," W replied. "Why can't you just sit for a moment? You've been avoiding us for the past week."

"I've been busy. And you know, I'm actually kind of busy right now." Tommy took a step forward, but W stuck his hand out to stop him.

"What the hell do you want?" Tommy snapped. His powers pulsed.

"We seriously need to talk," Tubbo said.

"You guys are acting like this is a damn intervention."

Tommy then scanned the room to see his three friends all wearing the same expression: a nauseating mix of discomfort and pity.

A laugh escaped his throat. “You’ve got to be joking.”

“This is serious. We’re worried about you,” W answered.

“I’m fine! I literally tell you a million times a day I’m fine!” Irritation seeped into his tone.

W pinched his nose bridge. “You are clearly not fine. Tubbo and Ranboo say—”

“Oh, so now we’re tattling to the fucking teacher now? Really?” Tommy interrupted, turning his attention to his roommates.

“You don’t want to do patrols with us anymore! You come back in the middle of the night from your patrols and then leave again in the morning before school! You don’t even wear your communicator anymore! What the hell are we supposed to do?” Tubbo shot back.

W stepped in between them and said, “Let’s calm down. No one here wants to fight. We want to help you, Tommy.”

“And how the hell are you guys going to ‘help’ me?” Tommy replied, using his fingers to make air quotes.

Silence hung in the air for a few moments as W, Tubbo, and Ranboo exchanged glances.

Finally, W answered in a quiet voice, “We think you need to take a break from being Vigilante.”

For a moment Tommy couldn’t even register the words. The sentence was so foreign that his body rejected them.

But then disbelief was swept away by a wave of anger.

“What the *fuck* did you just say to me?!” Tommy’s voice increased so fast that his vocal cords burned. The flames of rage and his powers twisted together, roasting beneath his skin.

W held his hands out cautiously, “I get that this isn’t ideal. But it’s for your own good. Maybe a few weeks off—”

“Who gave you the right to decide what’s good for me?! You know nothing about me or what I’ve been through!” Tommy spat, venom lacing his words.

“We care about you—”

“Care about me?” Tommy let out a humorless laugh. “Me? All you’ve ever wanted to do is control me! You think you’re so different because you ‘care’ and you’re ‘my friend.’ Well, *fuck you*, W. You’re just like *Dream*.”

W looked like Tommy had just stabbed him in the chest. And for a moment the ache in Tommy's chest made him feel like he just had, but anger swept away the feeling.

"Tommy, please," Tubbo softly pleaded and Tommy's frown deepened. Tubbo and Ranboo's looks of pity made his skin crawl. Or maybe it was the fact that a headache screamed behind his forehead.

"Ranboo told you about that night, didn't he?" Tommy snapped, his words spilled out as his mind spun.

Tubbo and Ranboo shared a telling look. Tommy clenched his jaw. He couldn't tell if his face was burning up from anger or shame. His brain hurt from the conflicting emotions battling for priority. He stared at the ground as the words continued to tumble out, "You're afraid of me, aren't you, Ranboo?"

"Well— I—" Ranboo stuttered out. But as Tommy raised his head, Ranboo's eyes said everything he needed to hear.

Suddenly a cold ripped through the fire in his chest. Excruciating pain sliced his spine. The floodgates cracked. His eyes went blurry.

Why couldn't they just leave him alone? Everything was falling apart. Everything was wrong. None of this was supposed to happen. He was supposed to have everything under control. Nothing was under control. How could he call them friends if they constantly feared him? Maybe that's what he needed. He needed to be *feared so he could be powerful. If he was powerful then he could be under control again and then none of this would happen. He could control everything then he would destroy—*

Tommy dug his nails into his palms and squeezed his eyes shut. This was wrong. This was all wrong. The energy made it feel like his skin was blistering now.

"Hey, are you okay?" someone said from a million miles away. That was too close. Everyone was too close. He needed to leave *now*.

With his last shreds of sanity, Tommy sprinted out of the room.

—

[Note: lol okay so at some point I would introduce a criminal group who was hunting Tommy specifically. They were followers of the Egg and even though the Egg and mind control powers are gone, they still worship it out of their own free will. Somehow and some way they figure out that Tommy used to be connected to the Egg so they're hunting him. The guy that got his arm crushed by Tommy wasn't a part of this group. He was truly just a random criminal. Ranboo took that guy to the hospital lol]

Tommy's mind continued to spin as he made his way across the city. He was on autopilot as he increased and decreased his gravity, spanning entire buildings with a single jump. He was disgusted at himself with the relief he felt as he used his power. The pain had subsided, but

the madness still crept on the edges of his mind. His body yearned to use his powers as if this insatiable desire was ingrained in his dna.

The ground fractured as he landed in an empty alley on the edge of town. He frowned at the satisfaction he felt as the cracks appeared under his feet. He gripped his head, pulling at his hair like that would stop his warring thoughts.

Why couldn't he just be satisfied? *He needed more.* Why couldn't he just listen to his friends? *They didn't understand him.* Why couldn't he just control his powers? *No one can control the fabric of space and time. No even someone who can manipulate it. There was no control. There was only acceptance. Accept the failure of this world. Accept the failure and start over. Start over. Start—*

Tommy clenched his jaw and a metallic taste filled his mouth. He was crazy. He was actually going crazy.

However, because he was in the middle of a full metal breakdown, Tommy failed to notice the four figures entering the alley.

“Vigilante,” a voice announced and Tommy snapped out of the haze. He blinked as the four men dressed in crimson red surrounded him. Oh no, not these weirdos again. Tommy did not have the time to deal with Egg loyalists right now.

The voice, which came from the man directly in front of Tommy, continued, “You will come with us. Resistance is futile.”

Tommy ran his hand through his hair. His powers were screaming in delight for a fight, but his hands shook as he repressed his instincts. “Listen guys, this is a really bad time. You need to get away—”

The men to his left and right both jumped to grab his arms, but Tommy ducked and dodged and the two men crashed. He felt the man behind him lunge so Tommy twisted around, grabbed the man and threw him into the other men. However, since Tommy's concentration was occupied with refraining from using his powers, he didn't notice when someone grabbed him from behind and jab something into his lower back

“Do not resist or I will send 100,000 volts of electricity through your body,” the man hissed into his ear.

“And if you don't let me go, I will send you to your grave,” Tommy replied through clenched teeth. He wished he was joking.

The taser dug deeper into his back as the man said, “Move. Now.”

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as his powers shrieked throughout his body, “Seriously, let me g—”

However, he was cut off by someone shoving him to the ground. Gravel scraped his palms before he twisted around to see the Egg Loyalist shouting profanities with a sword through

his arm, pinning him to the wall.

He recognized that blade. Tommy's heart leaped into his throat.

"Tommy." Techno's deep voice made Tommy jump as the pink-haired man kneeled in front of him. The faintest lines of worry creased his usual neutral expression. Tommy had never seen him in such distress.

Fear instantly enveloped any of the ease that came with seeing his friend. Techno wasn't supposed to be here. Techno wasn't supposed to be anywhere near him. Tommy tried to shuffle away, but pain paralyzed his muscles.

"You—You can't be here," Tommy sputtered out, a cold sweat covering his body.

"It's okay. Whatever is happening, we can solve it together," he continued. Techno held out his hands cautiously as if he was approaching a wild animal—no—he *was* approaching a wild animal.

Tommy shook his head. This was wrong. This was all wrong. He dug his fingers into the ground, the pressure cracking the asphalt. "You don't get it! You need to leave! Now! It's not safe. *I—I'm not safe.*"

Techno inched forward. "I'm not leaving you, Tommy. Let us help—"

He was interrupted by the sword protruding from his abdomen.

Techno grunted. He looked down at his blade that was now embedded in his body.

"No..." Tommy's voice was small. Blood covered the blade. *Techno's* blood covered the blade.

"Resistance will not be tolerated." Tommy's head shot up as the Egg Loyalist stood behind Techno, his arm leaking blood onto the asphalt.

And then,

the floodgates burst.

The Loyalist hit the brick wall with a satisfying crack. A smile crawled across Tommy's face when the man screamed, the pressure snapping his spine. His power enveloped his body in an euphoric warmth. *This is what he wanted. This is what he needed.* The man's screams echoed louder as he stepped closer. *No more pain. No more suffering. Only power. Power was all he needed. He was powerful. And he needed more. He needed m—*

"Tommy!"

He froze. The Loyalist slumped to the ground like a broken doll. He slowly turned around, skin burning at the pause of his powers.

W and Phil stood at the end of the alley with wide eyes as they took in the scene before them.

“Tommy, what are you doing?” W’s voice strained, like, for the first time in his life, he struggled to use it.

His eyes went blurry as a wave of nausea hit him. The Loyalist no longer screamed. The Loyalist no longer moved. Cold burned Tommy’s shaking hands. The Loyalist no longer breathed.

Tommy twisted around, wanting to explain, but the words disintegrated on his tongue.

His friends no longer looked like his friends. His friends would look at him with joy or even annoyance sometimes. But never this.

They both stared at him exactly like Ranboo did on that fateful night.

Their eyes were wide with *fear* .

They were afraid *of him*.

And suddenly everything made sense. A calm washed over him as a laugh escaped his lungs.

They had always been afraid of Tommy. Everyone had always been afraid of Tommy.

Foster parents. Teachers. Dream. Tubbo. Ranboo. Techno. Phil. W.

They all claimed they cared about him. They said they wanted to “help” him. But it was a lie. They didn’t care about his pain. They didn’t care about his suffering.

All they wanted was to control him. All they wanted was for him to be *weak* .

They failed to realize that *there was no control*. They failed to realize that *Tommy would never be weak again*. They failed to realize that *Tommy would be powerful*.

And he would end the world to prove it.

—

[So here we would have a perspective switch. It would probably be W since that’s how I set up the end of the last volume. However, I don’t really have a fully fleshed out scene in mind I can write so I’m just going to explain the premise of what would happen in this plot point.]

Tommy fully embraced the madness influenced by his powers. W and Phil tried to say something to him but instead Tommy ran away. After they briefly cared for Techno, who was still alive, W started to look for Tommy while Phil took Techno to a healer.

[Techno would’ve said something like “It’s not his fault.” or something like that lol]

Ranboo joined W in their search for Tommy and it was really easy to find him. Tommy was in the middle of the city basically starting to form a black hole where he was. He was destroying buildings and cars were being thrown around. The media was acting like this was

a freak earthquake. Obviously the gang knew better. However, as they were getting closer to where he is, the pressure was increasing and it was getting more and more difficult to move.

After some struggle they finally made their way to Tommy. At this point it seemed like he had completely lost it. He was smiling and laughing as buildings around him were crumbling under the pressure of gravity.

W and Ranboo still have faith in him and tried to talk to him. But it was useless. He was in his own world and with each passing moment the pressure was becoming more and more intense. The force was so strong now neither of them could stand. They were basically crawling on their hands and knees.

W believed that if he was just able to reach Tommy then he could use his powers to calm him down like when Tommy was opening the portal. However, even with the help of Ranboo's powers, it just wasn't possible to get close enough. The two of them were being crushed by the weight of gravity.

Even though Tommy was right in front of him, only feet away, the pressure was so strong W couldn't even lift his arm. He couldn't help him.

But just as W's consciousness started to fade, someone appeared behind Tommy. Dream. Every cell in W's body screamed to move, but the pressure did not release him. He was trapped to watch the man he hated do what he failed to accomplish.

Dream placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder. Immediately, Tommy's eyes rolled to the back of his head and he collapsed to the ground. At the same moment, air filled his lungs and relief spread throughout W's body and the pressure lifted off the entire world. However, W was paralyzed by his weak muscles.

Dream lifted Tommy into his arms. Tommy's head fell back with his blond hair gently swaying in the breeze. The hero turned one final time. His voice was level as he said, "I warned you that you wouldn't be able to stop him."

W did not have the luxury of watching Dream carry Tommy away as the world slipped into darkness.

—

[So we would have another pov switch here. I think it was going to be more W but I decided to switch it to Ranboo cuz I wanna write more Ranboo lolol. But there would be a time jump from the last scene. Okay Imma write the scenes now]

Ranboo did not like math.

He stared at this math problem for so long that the numbers started to look like chicken scratches. Then he dragged his hands down his face.

Yes, he had an A in math right now, but that did not mean that he liked it. To be honest, he tolerated all school subjects. He never had any passion to explore the histories, the sciences,

or any language (even English but he would never admit that to W). He simply did his work and got good grades. Good grades meant he could stay at Visions and if he graduated from Visions he could go to a great college and if went to college then he would eventually be successful for the rest of his life.

Or at least that's what everyone else said.

Ranboo was good at following directions. He liked having a plan. And six months ago, when he first got accepted to the Study-Work program at Visions, he felt a spark of passion while working as a hero. He helped people and brought peace to the city! Finally, it seemed like he had found the perfect path for him.

Until he learned he worked for a manipulative psychopath.

So Ranboo reworked the plan. Maybe he couldn't be a regular hero. He didn't want to be complicit in a corrupt system anyway. He didn't need the accolades when he had his friends. With them, Ranboo was content helping the people of the city as a vigilante. With a few adjustments, he had found another plan that he felt confident in!

Until his friend almost destroyed the city and then got kidnapped by their old boss.

And then there was now. He was about to fail his math midterm because he couldn't get himself to finish a single set of practice problems.

Ranboo's current life plan was currently burning in a dumpster fire.

"What am I even doing?" Ranboo asked, directed to the math, but also at his priorities. He turned slightly to see Tubbo sitting at his desk exactly where he had been for the whole day.

Focus filled his face as he stared intensely at his monitors, routinely clicking through the screens. He hadn't moved an inch since Ranboo came back from class. The number of protein bar wrappers and energy drinks littered around his desk had increased from the previous day, making Ranboo frown. Tubbo had been like this since Tommy disappeared. Two weeks ago.

Ranboo knew better to ask if he had gone to class. It was redundant. Ranboo already knew the answer. Instead he asked, "Have you done the review for the math midterm?"

"Huh? Uh yeah, yeah..." Tubbo mumbled, not looking away from the screens.

Ranboo stood up with his notebook and continued, "Could you help--"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" Tubbo snapped.

Ranboo shifted uncomfortably. Maybe if he had any fight left in him he would've shot back. He would go off on the fact that Tubbo sat all day on that stupid computer, looking through security footage and finding absolutely nothing. He would yell about the fact that they went searching every night for a glimpse of Dream but the hero hadn't been seen by anyone in two weeks. Maybe if he had any fight left he would actually finish this damn math review.

But there was nothing in Ranboo. When Tommy vanished, so did his fight.

Instead he replied, “You could’ve just said ‘no.’”

Regret immediately washed over Tubbo’s face. He rubbed the bridge of his nose as he answered, “Shit. I’m sorry. I haven’t gotten much sleep.”

Ranboo sat on his bed, staring at the ground. It was better than staring at the empty bed above Tubbo’s. All he could muster out was, “It’s fine.”

A few moments of silence passed between them. Ranboo wasn’t sure when their relationship had become so awkward. It wasn’t like they couldn’t be friends without Tommy. The two of them were friends before Tommy even started being nice to Ranboo. Yet when he disappeared, something had shifted. Another failed plan.

Tubbo cleared his throat, breaking the quiet. “So I was thinking about the route for your patrol tonight. What do you think about going through the East End first?”

What was the point of changing a route that doesn’t find anything anyway? However, Ranboo replied quietly, “The thing is I still have a lot of studying to do for midterms. I’m not sure if I can go tonight...”

Tubbo furrowed his eyebrows. “What are you talking about? We need to—”

He was interrupted by a knock at the door. The roommates exchanged confused looks.

“Are you expecting someone?” Ranboo asked, heading towards the door.

“Yeah, I just invited our dozens of friends for a surprise party,” Tubbo answered, sarcasm soaking his words. “It’s going to be a rager.”

Ranboo rolled his eyes as he opened the door. His heart skipped a beat as a blond teenage boy stood in front of him.

However, as his brain registered the rest of the visitor, his excitement faltered. The visitor had blond hair, but it was closer to a pale, silver blond rather than Tommy’s golden blond. He wore a purple hoodie with a black backpack and a matching duffle bag in hand.

“Is this room 420?” he asked flatly.

“Uh, yeah, it is...” Ranboo furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. “Do you need something?”

“Nah, I’m just going to drop my stuff off and then head to—”

“Wait,” Ranboo interrupted. “Why are you dropping your stuff off?”

“Oh, didn’t they tell you? I’m your new roommate.” He held out his hand. “I’m Purpled.”

Ranboo felt his brain short circuit.

However, before he could reply, he was shoved to the side. As Tubbo stepped in, he exclaimed, “We already have three people in this room!”

“Maybe you have the wrong floor?” Ranboo suggested.

Purpled took out his phone and scrolled for a few seconds, before shaking his head. “Nope. It says here that I am in room 420.”

“Well, obviously they are wrong!” Tubbo countered.

Purpled shrugged. “I just go where they tell me.”

“Wait, wait.” Ranboo held up his hand and asked, “Don’t you need to be in the work-study program to live in this building? There are no openings at this time of the year.”

“The lady who accepted me said there was a surprise opening. Something about someone leaving the program,” Purpled answered nonchalantly.

Ranboo and Tubbo looked at each other with wide eyes. Ranboo started, “You don’t think...”

“Shit!” Tubbo cursed before running out of the room, ramming Purpled in the shoulder.

“So sorry about all this,” Ranboo said as he slipped by Purpled and chased after Tubbo.

—

“Check again!” Tubbo yelled. Ranboo stood awkwardly beside him. His dread made it hard to be present.

“Young man, I already told you,” The secretary behind the desk replied with the patience of a saint, “Tommy Innit has unenrolled from Visions Academy. There is nothing else I can tell you.”

“But it’s not possible! He was just here! All his things are still in our room!” Tubbo retaliated, desperation slowly slipping into his tone.

The secretary typed something into her computer. “I will let admin know that we need to send someone over to clear out his things.”

“Wha—? No! That’s not what— You can’t clear out his things! He obviously didn’t want to leave! You need to help get him back!” Tubbo replied.

“That is outside of our jurisdiction. His guardian pulled him from our program. There is nothing else that can be done.” The secretary paused before letting out a sigh. “I have no other information. They asked for him to be removed from the system.”

“Removed?” Ranboo repeated. “Like deleted? They deleted him from the system?”

The secretary nodded.

Ranboo's mind spun. Dream wanted to make it seem like Tommy never existed. He wanted to erase him.

Tubbo banged his fist on the desk before storming off. Ranboo turned back to the secretary with an apologetic expression. But before he could say anything, she continued, "I'm sorry about your friend."

"I'm sorry too," he choked out. That's all he could say lately. *Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.* Ranboo clenched his jaw. What a useless word.

He followed Tubbo outside, trailing him onto the sidewalk. He ran to catch up with him before asking, "What are you even doing?"

"I'm going to the bookstore. We need to tell W, Phil, and Techno about this," Tubbo answered.

"And what are they going to do?" Ranboo spoke without filtering his thoughts. He bit his tongue.

Tubbo snapped around, anger twisting his face. "You know what, Ranboo? If you're more concerned with failing a midterm than finding Tommy then that's your fucking problem! But personally I don't have time for stupid fucking questions! Are you coming or not?"

Tubbo stomped down the street as shame heated Ranboo's face. He hated that he was more concerned with his midterm. He hated that any fight in him was extinguished by the helplessness drowning him. He hated that he couldn't do anything but follow.

But that's what he was good at.

And that's why Ranboo allowed his feet to follow Tubbo, no matter what his heart said.

—

"—will never guess what fucking happened!"

Ranboo only heard the end of Tubbo's shout as he entered the bookstore. The bells jingled as he stepped in and saw Techno at the register checking out a customer.

His pink-haired coworker didn't acknowledge his foul-mouthed roommate's entrance as he handed a book to a tall woman with braids and said, "Thank you. Hope you come back soon."

She shot a look of disapproval at Tubbo before taking the book and passing Ranboo, sounding the bells again.

"You do know this is a bookstore, right?" Techno raised an eyebrow at Tubbo. He then turned to Ranboo and gestured at the door. "Do you mind?"

Before any more customers would be berated by Tubbo's rant, Ranboo flipped the 'open' sign to 'closed' and locked the door.

“Tommy left Visions!” Tubbo exclaimed. “And when we pressed them about it, they just said that ‘they couldn’t give us any other information.’ What bullshit!”

“Why is there so much yelling?” W’s voice came from behind a bookshelf. He turned the corner and crossed his arms as Phil followed behind him with a box of books in hand. W went on, “You do know this is a bookstore?”

“Tommy is gone!” Tubbo blurted out.

Phil and W exchanged a glance before Phil stated, “We already know that, mate.”

“Fuck!” Tubbo pinched his nose bridge before clarifying, “I mean he’s no longer a student at Visions! Dream pulled him out of school!”

“Well, he has been missing for two weeks. The school could’ve just expelled him,” Techno chimed in.

“They told us that his ‘guardian’ took him out of the program,” Ranboo replied, making sure to use air-quotes around ‘guardian.’

“And then the asshole asked for his data to be removed from the system,” Tubbo added with a scowl twisting his face.

“How do you even know about this?” W asked. “I thought you were just monitoring security footage.”

Tubbo and Ranboo looked at each other, wondering which one of them would have to break the next bad news. Tubbo let out a sigh and answered, “We got a new roommate.”

Silence hung in the air for a few moments. Ranboo shifted his weight between his feet. It was tiring participating in fruitless conversations. And he still had a midterm to study for.

“Well, shit,” W muttered, staring at the ground. His face was hard to read, but it seemed like he wanted to say something else, but instead he was quiet again.

“I thought if we got any update on Tommy, I would see it as a positive,” Phil voiced as he set the box down and sat on it. “But I feel like this information makes me even more concerned. You said that they asked to have his data removed?” Ranboo and Tubbo nodded and Phil’s expression was serious as he continued, “Someone is trying to hide any trace of him.”

Ranboo swallowed the anxiety that rose up his throat. Or maybe it was bile. He couldn’t tell the difference.

Someone else continued the conversation, but Ranboo barely heard them. Just standing here made him exhausted. The four of them could throw ideas all day about what the hell any of this meant, but the cruel reality was that throwing ideas was all they could do.

It didn’t matter that Tommy wasn’t a student anymore. It didn’t matter that a new blonde kid slept in Tommy’s bed. None of it mattered because they didn’t have a damn clue where Tommy was.

We don't even know if he's alive, Ranboo thought. He was disgusted at the fact that he could even think something like that. Lately, there were a lot of things about himself that disgusted him.

A vibration broke him away from his thoughts. He pulled his phone from his pocket to see a notification light up the screen. His stomach dropped.

The message read:

LIVE NOW: Dream Announces New Apprentice!

“What the hell?” Confusion quickly twisted into irritation. Ranboo clicked off his phone and shoved it into his pocket. Dream’s replacement for him was the last damn thing he needed to be thinking about right now. However, when he looked up, everyone else’s eyes were on him.

“Are you okay?” Techno asked.

“I’m fine,” he mumbled and lowered his head. He did not have the energy to deal with any of the frantic thoughts pounding at the back of his head.

“Oh...” Tubbo’s voice made him lift his head and Ranboo frowned at the phone in Tubbo’s hand. “Damn, it’s like Dream can’t live without having a sidekick to yell at.”

“What?” W asked as Phil and Techno just raised their eyebrows.

“Dream is announcing his replacement for Ranboo right now,” Tubbo explained nonchalantly. Ranboo glared at him, but Tubbo smirked and replied, “You’re lucky. Dream waited more than a month before replacing you. Tommy got replaced in less than 24 hours.”

By me, Ranboo thought. *I replaced him. And now someone is replacing me.*

A hole opened up in Ranboo’s chest. He grit his teeth. He didn’t even like Dream. Why the hell did he even care about the idiot who decided to align themselves with him?

Because I’m being replaced.

Ranboo wanted to slam his head into a wall. Maybe that would stop him from thinking.

“*I take great pride in protecting this city*,” said a nauseating familiar voice. Ranboo snapped his head up as Dream continued, “*and my fellow heroes and I work endlessly to keep our home safe for everyone.*”

His roommate and his three coworkers had made their way to behind the counter where Techno had set up a laptop, playing the broadcast. The damn broadcast of Dream introducing his replacement.

Tubbo scoffed, “I can’t believe people believe this bullshit.”

“Didn’t you used to believe it?” Techno asked.

“I didn’t know he was crazy at the time!”

“What are you doing?!” Ranboo exclaimed.

He was immediately shushed as Dream continued through the speakers, “*I, for one, know how difficult it can be to run towards danger. It goes against all of our instincts. So when we find someone who is willing to fight those instincts for the sake of others, we must nurture this passion. That is the goal of the apprentice program.*”

Ranboo rolled his eyes. There was nothing nurturing about the training Dream put him through. Torture was a more accurate term.

“*Today, I would like to present to you the newest hero of the apprentice program. I look forward to working with him to help keep our home safe. It is my honor to introduce my apprentice, Atlas.*”

Applause burst through the speakers, but Ranboo was busy suppressing a laugh. Atlas? Really? Dream really got a sidekick named after the book filled with maps? What could this guy even do? Give good directions? Wasn’t that what GPS was for?

He turned to confer with his friends about the stupidity, but then his smile dropped.

W, Phil, and Techno all shared similar intense serious expressions as they stared at the screen. W’s brows furrowed together while Phil’s mouth tightened into a thin line. Techno leaned forward, covering half his face with his hands. However, it was Tubbo who made Ranboo pause. His eyes were wide and all the color drained from his face.

“What happened?” Ranboo asked as curiosity took control of his body and led him to the other side of the counter. “This new guy can’t be that bad—”

He saw the screen and his blood went cold.

Surrounded by a crowd of cheering fans, Dream and his new apprentice, Atlas, stood together on the stage.

Atlas’s posture was rigid as the camera slowly zoomed in on the new hero. He wore a black hero suit with the seams tipped in green that matched his mentor. A black mask was molded over his eyes, emphasizing his lack of expression though there was a crowd of adoring fans cheering his name. However, unlike his mentor, he did not wear a hood. Instead, Atlas allowed his blond hair to gently sway in the breeze.

It wasn’t a pale, silver blond though. It was a golden blond.

The height. The build. The hair. There was no denying it. Ranboo would know the person who he was trained to learn everything about from a mile away. It was ingrained in Ranboo to recognize him.

Dream’s new apprentice,

Ranboo’s replacement,

Atlas was *Tommy* .

[can you guys imagine if I ended a chapter there? Yall would've been screaming at me lol]

The late afternoon sun spread across the floor as the five of them sat in silence. It had only been a few minutes since the broadcast had finished, but to Ranboo, it felt like an eternity. He forced himself to stare at the golden light coating the floor. Everytime he closed his eyes all he could see was Tommy standing next to Dream.

His friend was standing next to the man who made their lives a living hell. His friend was going to be his apprentice. His friend was going to be his servant. He was going to be forced to follow every single one of his bullshit orders—

“Dream has to be controlling him or something, right?” Tubbo said, breaking Ranboo away from his thoughts. “Like the Egg did with me.”

“I’m not sure if there is a hero with the ability of mind control, though,” W replied.

“Didn’t Tommy say that Dream stole his memories?” Phil asked. “What if Dream stole all of his memories and convinced him that he is helping him?”

A shiver ran down Ranboo’s spine. He knew Dream was evil, but was he evil enough to steal all of Tommy’s memories? Something just didn’t sound right.

“But why would he do that?” Ranboo asked out loud.

“Because he’s the worst?” Phil answered.

“Because he’s evil?” Techno added.

“Because he’s an asswipe who wants to ruin our lives?” Tubbo followed up.

Ranboo shook his head. “You aren’t wrong. But Dream doesn’t just do things without a reason. If he took Tommy’s memories then there’s a reason—”

“Who cares why Dream did it?” W cut him off with a frown. “We need to focus on Tommy. Doesn’t matter how or why he’s with Dream. We need to free him.”

Ranboo snapped his mouth shut. W was right. Dream was just an obstacle in front of Tommy. Tommy was the goal. Ranboo grit his teeth as *deja vu* washed over him. Once again, he was being forced to make Tommy a priority.

He squeezed his eyes closed. Dream and Tommy flashed in his mind. This was supposed to be behind them. They escaped this. They were never supposed to go back.

“Since Dream is back in the public eye, he will need to go back on patrol,” Tubbo went on. “I can track his routes and we can intercept one and grab Tommy.”

“We’ll need to be careful. He won’t be able to just throw him over our shoulder,” W replied.

“Maybe we can...” The voices of the conversation faded into the background as a memory floated to the front of Ranboo’s mind.

The full moon was high in the cloudless sky that night. Ranboo and Tommy sat on the roof of a building after a slow patrol, legs dangling off the edge. After a few hours of fruitless patrolling, they conceded and ended up here. Their closest moment of excitement that evening was when they stopped a criminal from stealing an entire ATM. He ran away the moment they approached him.

“Hey, Ranboo,” Tommy whispered, catching his attention. “I think Tubbo fell asleep.”

Ranboo waited a few seconds, expecting a response in his ear from their roommate, but instead he was met with silence. Ranboo shook his head with a smile and replied, “I had a feeling he wasn’t going to be able to keep up after he insisted on chugging that Redbull. He knows that energy drinks don’t work on him anymore.”

“It was over for him the moment he said he was just going to listen to us,” Tommy said with a laugh.

“Well, I’m glad he can rest a bit. After the past few weeks, it finally feels like everything is going back to normal.” Ranboo sighed. “Except for my sleep schedule.”

Tommy bumped his shoulder with his as he replied, “Join the club. Hate to break it to you but your sleep schedule will never be normal again. But it’s okay, just sleep during class.” Ranboo groaned as Tommy laughed. He went on, “Oh, it’s not that bad. You’ll absorb the information as you sleep. That’s what I do!”

“Oh, yeah? And how’s that going for you?”

“Great! I’m passing all my classes!”

“Barely. I am tutoring you in half of them.”

“You’re just jealous of my amazing learning abilities. I completely understand. If I was you, I would be jealous of me too.”

Ranboo laughed lightly. “Oh no, that’s not why I’m jealous of you.”

“What?” Tommy’s voice went soft. Ranboo turned to see a confused look covering his face. “You’re jealous of me?”

Ranboo felt heat warm his cheeks despite the chilly temperature. His eyes fell to his feet. “I-well- I mean- I guess I’ve always been jealous of how you don’t care what others think.”

Tommy chuckled. “If you think I dress terribly, you can just tell me.”

Ranboo shook his head apologetically. “No, no! I’m serious! You always do what you think is right, no matter what other people are doing! You help everyone even without praise and

thanks! You make your own choices and push towards the life you want without caring about other opinions. That's what I meant. I admire that part about you. But I'm also a bit jealous, since I'm not very good at it."

"Oh, um, thanks..." Tommy trailed off as a few moments of silence passed. Ranboo internally cursed himself for making things awkward. Hopefully, Tommy would make some joke about Ranboo being soft. Ranboo started to think of a sly comeback. Maybe he could say something about the fact that Tommy didn't like it when his food touched. Oh, that one could work—

"I wasn't always good at it, though." Tommy broke the silence, his voice serious. "Last year, I would've done anything Dream told me. I think I would've jumped off a building for him if he told me to."

His gaze was set on the city skyline as he went on, "For a while I wondered why he would even take my memories. I did everything he ever asked. I opened a damn portal to another dimension for him. Even after 404 disappeared and Dream became cold towards me, I followed all his orders without a question. He was harsh and cruel and I still wanted his approval. Maybe my desire for his attention made him think that if he took my memories then I would be the loyal apprentice he wanted except without the power to open portals.

"But that's the thing. When Dream took my memories, I don't think my memories are the only things I lost. After I forgot that I was using my powers to help him, I felt useless. All he forced me to do stupid paperwork. I got sick of it pretty fast. Without a reason to stay, I quit. Ironically, when he stole my memories, he also stole my faith in him. But I guess, maybe that was always his plan because then you..."

He didn't need to finish the sentence. Ranboo knew what came next. Tommy cleared his throat and continued, "My memories with him are still pretty muddled. I really only remember bits and pieces. But now that they're back, I can't help but wonder if that version of me will come back. The me who craves his approval. The me who was Dream's loyal apprentice."

His words hung in the air. Dream's loyal apprentice. It was the title that they both held at one point in time. But there was a difference between them. Tommy was strong enough to leave Dream. Tommy chose his path and turned away from the man who wanted to control him. On the other hand, Dream was the one who left Ranboo. Powerless and cowardly Ranboo was thrown away by a man who hardly spoke to him.

"I was supposed to be someone else's apprentice," Ranboo spoke up. He saw Tommy turn his head from the corner of his eye. "I think it may have been 404 or Blaze. I had initially applied for Dream, but I was told Dream's apprentice was filled already. So it was a surprise to me when I came in that Dream was there. Those first few days I was riding on such a high, I don't think I even realized what he was asking me to do."

Ranboo pulled his knees to his chest and then continued, "All we ever talked about was you. He tried to masquerade it by saying I was keeping you safe and for a while I believed him. Then I heard the way you talked about him. I saw the way you looked at him. Deep down, I knew there was a different reason why Dream wanted me to follow you. But, I continued to lie to myself. I wanted to believe Dream had good intentions. I wanted to believe I was doing something good."

Ranboo felt a bump on his shoulder and raised his head. Tommy wore a soft smile. "It's not your fault," he said. "He was a manipulative asshole. He was using us."

"But you stood up to him... You're better than me."

"Don't say that." Tommy's voice was stern. "It's what he wanted. He wanted us to compete and fight for his attention. Everything he did was to control us."

Ranboo didn't entirely agree with Tommy's statement. Tommy didn't realize it but everything Dream did was to control Tommy. Dream didn't need to control Ranboo. Ranboo did everything he asked. Ranboo couldn't say that he would defy him even after all this time.

However, Ranboo just nodded. He didn't need to disturb the peaceful air settling between them. A few moments passed as the two of them continued to gaze out towards the city. Lights sprinkled the dark buildings, reminding him of the stars above them.

Ranboo had just started thinking about the homework he needed to finish when Tommy spoke up again. "Hey, Ranboo."

"Hm?"

"Can I ask you for a favor?" Tommy focused his eyes on the ground as Ranboo turned to him.

"Of course."

Tommy paused to take a deep breath in. Then he met Ranboo's eyes.

"Promise me that you'll never let me go back to him. Even if I give you some stupid reason, you can't let me go back. I even give you permission to beat some sense into me... Do whatever it takes, okay?"

"I promise." Then Ranboo smiled softly. "However, you have to promise that you would do the same for me."

Tommy returned the smile as he said, "You don't need me to promise that I'll beat you up. I will gladly do that right now, if you'd like."

Ranboo rolled his eyes. "As if you would win."

"I would slap the shit out of you!"

"You would slap me? What are you, five?"

Tommy stood up with a devilish smile. "Would you like me to demonstrate?"

Ranboo teleported back as Tommy leaped towards him. "Get away from me!" he yelled as Tommy laughed.

“Ranboo?” Tubbo’s voice made him snap his head up, pulling him away from the memory. He instantly felt the weight of four pairs of eyes on him. Tubbo continued, “What do you think?”

He blinked. “Think of what?”

Tubbo frowned as he snapped, “The plan! The damn plan to save Tommy! I’m so sorry that we’re not discussing your midterm! Maybe we can schedule that in before we save Tommy!”

Phil stepped forward and said, “Whoa, whoa! You need to calm down, mate.”

Ranboo shrunk as Tubbo scoffed, “Whatever. But I’m not repeating the plan.”

“It’s fine,” Phil turned to Ranboo. “So we’re going ahead with Tubbo’s idea of tracking patrols...”

Ranboo listened this time, but it didn’t really matter how they got to Tommy. He would find Tommy. This was what he trained for.

But this time he had a promise to fulfill.

—

As the last flares of sunlight disappeared behind the horizon, a deep darkness spread across the city. Ranboo kept his eyes forward, teleporting from rooftop to rooftop. The only indication of his presence were the purple specks left in his absence.

The Number One Hero and his apprentice were on patrol route beta, passing through the intersection of Atlantic Boulevard and Davidson Lane. However, tonight the heroes will take a detour to the west due to the robbery near Central Avenue, a special thanks to Quackity and his contacts. But they would never make it to their destination.

“I have eyes on both of them,” Phil’s voice buzzed in his ears. Ranboo stopped teleporting, immediately turning to scan rooftops. Then his stomach twisted. About two blocks away, a green flash jumped to and from buildings. And barely noticeable in the dark, was his apprentice, following him like a shadow.

“Ready?” W’s voice came next. Ranboo let out a sigh.

“Ready,” Phil confirmed.

“Ready,” Techno repeated.

His gut disagreed as Ranboo also said, “Ready.”

Tubbo’s voice was the last. *“Bring him back.”*

If someone answered his roommate, Ranboo didn’t hear. His mind was locked on his next location. The exact spot where Dream left and a shadow would land.

Ranboo breathed in.

Then he burst through a veil of purple flurries. His feet skid on the concrete, almost losing his balance. In his peripheral vision, wings slammed into the green hero. Both bodies vanished behind a building. At the same instant, Ranboo twisted as another pair of feet hit the roof. Their eyes met.

Even with a new mask and a new suit, Tommy's surprise gave him away. His eyes went wide, realization settling in, but Ranboo didn't give him the luxury. He leapt through purple before Tommy could finish his curse. With a new location clear in his mind, Ranboo gripped the sidekick's arms and the two of them instantly were covered by more flurries.

Ranboo felt the pain first. His back crashed into the ground, making the world spin. He barely noticed the groans beside him matching his. Then he felt the breeze freckle water droplets on his cheeks.

"Did you get him?" Tubbo's voice buzzed in his ear. Ranboo shot up.

On one side of him dark waves crashed into walls, filling the air with a soft haze. On the other side, rows of shipping containers and buildings filled the docks. However, between him and the containers, Tommy sat up clutching his head.

"Tom—" Ranboo began. However, the second Tommy registered his voice, he scrambled to his feet and ran inland. Fortunately, he didn't make it very far as W jumped in his path.

Ranboo jumped up and Tommy faintly cursed as he whipped his head between W and Ranboo. He tried to run again, but quickly found himself backed up into a corner, with W and Ranboo blocking his paths.

"Tommy, please, just listen to us," W's voice was quiet and he held his hands up by his head. "We're not going to hurt you."

W attempted to take a step closer, but Tommy shouted, "Don't fucking come near me! I don't need you fucking with my head!"

"Okay, okay," W said and retreated. Ranboo shuffled uncomfortably to the side. W was better with words anyway. If there was someone who could make Tommy remember his old life it would be W.

W went on, "Tommy, I need you to listen to me very closely. Dream isn't who you think he is. I don't know what he told you, but we're not your enemies. We actually are your friends. Dream messed with your memories—"

"Wait. Do you think Dream stole my memories?" Tommy interrupted. Ranboo's blood ran cold as a smile spread across Tommy's face. Ranboo gave W a glance, but W kept his eyes forward, the color gone from his face.

A humorless laugh filled the air before Tommy continued, "Of course you think he stole my memories! You probably think that he made me forget all about you guys! Why am I not

fucking surprised?!”

“But...” W’s voice was barely a whisper.

“The last fucking thing you could think of was that Tommy made a choice for himself for once! There’s no way that he could ever want to be a hero! He had to be brainwashed!” His words were soaked with venom, each of them digging into Ranboo’s chest. “Well, guess what? *You’re wrong*. I haven’t lost my memory. I haven’t been brainwashed. For the first time in a long time, I’m thinking clearly.”

“ *No...* ” Tubbo muttered faintly.

“But–But Dream kidnapped you,” W choked out. “I– I saw–”

Tommy held his arms out. “Do I look fucking kidnapped to you? I didn’t know that we all had to ask *you* for fucking permission! I’m sorry that you don’t get to control all my life actions, but get over it! I’m my own person! You don’t get to tell me what to do anymore!”

W shrank at his words. “Tommy, I never knew you felt that way. I just wanted to help–”

“Ha! Help? Were you helping me by fueling my criminal career? Were you helping me when letting me almost die for you? Fuck you and your help, W. I don’t need it. I’m doing perfectly fine without it.”

W opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He lowered his eyes. Ranboo could tell he was getting lost in his own thoughts.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Prime. I’m so fucking done–”

“Why?” Ranboo’s words left his throat before he could stop them. “Why are you doing this?”

His scowl deepened as his gaze landed on Ranboo. “Big talk coming from a fucking coward.”

The insult sheathed itself into Ranboo’s back. He ignored the pain as he stated, “You hate Dream. You would never work with him.”

“Have you considered that I got a damn wake up call when I realized I was ruining my life? Maybe I didn’t want to be a loser criminal for the rest of my life! Maybe I wanted to finally be a hero! Why are you acting like you know a single thing about me, Ranboo? Just because you spied on me, doesn’t mean you know anything.”

Ranboo grit his teeth. This was wrong. Everything about this was wrong. “This isn’t you, Tommy.”

“Maybe it is now,” he sneered.

As he words hung in the air, rage began to burn in Ranboo’s chest. It bubbled under skin and made his entire body tense up. He rolled his fingers into fists and his nails dug into palms.

Tommy looked between W and Ranboo with disdain. “If you try some shit like this again, I’ll throw you into jail. That is a promise.”

Then he leapt into the air, disappearing over the containers. Ranboo took a step forward to follow, anger searing his lungs, but someone grabbed his wrist.

“We need to follow him!” He exclaimed, ripping W’s hand off his wrist.

W shook his head, sadness filling his eyes. “We have to respect what he said—”

“Who the hell cares what he said?!” Ranboo snapped back, surprising W. “We can’t let him do this!”

“We can’t force him to come with us! We wouldn’t be any better than Dream!”

“I was never better than Dream.”

Then Ranboo vanished in a flurry of purple particles.

—

“*Ranboo, we need to regroup—*” Tubbo started but Ranboo pulled the communicator out of his ear and threw back where W was.

The container let out a hollow ring as Ranboo walked across it. He immediately spotted his target, leaping farther and farther away. He pinpointed the next container he would land on. Then he launched himself through the purple particles.

“Shit!” Tommy yelped as he dodged Ranboo’s entrance. “I told you to stay away—”

Ranboo was done listening. He wrenched his arm back and plowed his fist into Tommy’s face.

Tommy’s body hit the container with a *clang*. Ranboo immediately jumped on him. But before Ranboo could hit again, Tommy kicked him in the gut, sending him backwards. Ranboo grunted as he pushed himself back up.

Tommy did the same as he wiped the blood from his mouth. He growled, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m keeping my promise.”

Suddenly, Tommy’s face dropped. His eyes were filled with shock.

However, this moment of hesitation was all Ranboo needed. He ran forward and slammed his body into Tommy’s. Ranboo held onto Tommy with a death grip as the two of them flew off the container.

Pain shot through his shoulder as they hit the asphalt. Tommy struggled to escape Ranboo’s clutches, but Ranboo pinned him on the ground. He battered Ranboo’s arms as he yelled,

“Let me fucking go!”

“No!” Ranboo screamed. “Not until you give this up!”

“Why the fuck do you care?!”

The right side of Tommy’s face was bright red and both of them were breathing heavily. Ranboo pulled Tommy up by the collar so their eyes were level. “Neither of us are supposed to go back.”

“You can’t make me leave with you, Ranboo,” Tommy snapped, but his eyes held no anger.

“I don’t care. I’ll drag you out of here if I have to,” Ranboo hissed.

“You don’t fucking get it! I want this! I want to be Dream’s apprentice! So just leave me the fuck alone!”

“If you wanted me to leave you alone so badly, then why haven’t you used your powers to fight back yet? Why the hell did you let W talk in the first place? We all know you can crush us like bugs. So why the hell are we still fighting, Tommy?”

A beat passed as the air was filled with the sound of waves crashing and their breathing. Then Tommy dropped his eyes to the ground. He started to say something, but before his voice reached Ranboo’s ears, the two of them were ripped apart.

He immediately twisted around, rage flaring in his chest again. He was so close to getting Tommy to give up. He was so close to bringing Tommy back to them. Who the hell would dare get in his way—

“What the hell are you doing, Ranboo?”

Every cell in his body froze. No. No. *No*. He wasn’t supposed to be here. He was supposed to be distracted. He was supposed to be—

“Don’t make me repeat the question.”

Ranboo slowly turned around. His instincts were screaming for him to run, but his body was paralyzed. That damn smile seared into his soul as he croaked out, “We had a disagreement.”

“Dream,” Tommy said quietly, “let’s just go—”

“TOMMY, SHUT UP!” Dream’s command echoed off of the metal surrounding them. Both of the teenagers went rigid.

Ranboo could feel himself shrinking in on himself, trying to make his body as small as possible. His old mentor continued, “And who gave you the right to attack a hero, Ranboo?”

“No one,” Ranboo replied with his eyes on the ground. He was pathetic. Even after all this time, he still couldn’t do anything but cower in Dream’s presence.

“Attacking a hero is against the law,” Dream stated. “I could arrest you right now, Ranboo. Do you want me to arrest you?”

Ranboo shook his head. His entire body had gone on autopilot.

“I don’t want to arrest you either. The last thing I want to do tonight is paperwork. Why don’t you apologize to Tommy and we can all put this incident behind us.”

As Ranboo raised his head, his eyes met Tommy’s. Ranboo began to apologize, barely knowing what words he was saying. But as he went on, Tommy’s eyes continued to stare back at him. Ranboo had seen those eyes before. They matched his whenever he looked in the mirror. They were hollow. Empty. Hopeless.

Ranboo paused. What was he doing? This wasn’t a part of the plan. He had a promise to fulfill.

Tommy was the goal. Tommy had always been the goal. And there was one last thing Ranboo could do to free him.

“Why him?” Ranboo asked, directing all of this strength into his words as he faced Dream.

“What?” the hero retorted.

“Why is Tommy your apprentice?” Ranboo pushed on. “He hates listening. He hates taking orders. And he hates working with others. So why the hell is Tommy your apprentice?”

Realization spread across Tommy’s face. Worry furrowed his brows as he asked, “Ranboo, what are you doing?”

Ranboo ignored him. The words were spilling out, desperation soaking every single one of them. “Let me take his place, Dream! Let me be your apprentice again! I’ve replaced him before I can replace him again! We both know I’ve always been more loyal than Tommy. I can be better than him, I swear!”

Tommy stared at him horrified. Ranboo was doing the last thing he could think of to save him though. His life was the last thing he could give up. All Dream wanted was someone to control. Ranboo could give him that.

If he couldn’t even fulfill a simple promise to his friend, what kind of friend was he? Ranboo couldn’t fail. Tommy was right there. He needed to bring Tommy home.

“But you will never be better than Tommy.”

Ranboo froze.

Dream’s voice drilled into his mind as the hero went on, “You never replaced him. You were merely a placeholder until he came back. And now that he is back in his rightful place, why the hell would I want you?”

His body was numb. His mind was barely keeping up with the words.

“You’re not even on the same caliber as Tommy,” Dream continued. “His powers far exceed yours. Why do you think I made you keep an eye on him? You were simply a tool for me to know what Tommy was doing. I thought you were smart enough to realize you were being used, Ranboo. I never cared about your loyalty to me. It was always obvious you weren’t my first choice. You weren’t even my second or third. You were the convenient choice.”

He was the fucking convenient choice.

“So, no. I do not need a new apprentice. The one I have is the one I want. I do not need you any more, Ranboo. Tommy, let’s go.”

His eyes stared at the ground as Dream jumped into the air. A few moments later, Tommy followed him, leaving Ranboo alone with the crashing waves.

He shouldn’t care what Dream thinks. He shouldn’t care about being compared to Tommy. He shouldn’t care about any of this shit.

But he did. He cared so much.

A guttural scream erupted from his throat as he ripped the mask off his face. He pushed his forehead into the asphalt, clutching his hair.

It didn’t matter how much he planned. It didn’t matter if he followed someone else. It didn’t matter if he followed his heart. It didn’t matter if he sacrificed himself.

None of it mattered because *he* didn’t matter.

Tommy was the goal. Tommy was always the goal.

Then suddenly it was clear.

He lifted himself off the ground and unclipped his cloak and the fabric fell to his feet.

His goals didn’t matter. None of them. Not even Tommy.

—

—

—

[okay to be honest... i was not planning this much into a ranboo arc... i just started writing and then i accidentally gave him angst... sorry? Idk lol

alright so we kind of have hit the point where I don’t really have any more full scenes to write with dialogue and all that. I wish I could give you more, but I really don’t have the energy or time to write any more full scenes. Not to mention I just literally have no idea how i would resolve the problems I created. So from here on out I’m just going to brain dumping the rest of the plot points.

Please excuse the terrible explanations from here on out. I want these ideas to be out of my brain please and thank you :)]

So after Ranboo's break down (rip) we would probably finish the chapter with him with a scene or two essentially being emo and telling his friends that he no longer wants to be involved with finding Tommy. He takes it so far that he transfers out of the work-study program and quits his job and moves into a different dorm room.

Tubbo is pissed at him but he doesn't really care. He feels guilty that he's being selfish, but the fact is that for once in his life he is finally putting his own needs forward. However, as he spends more time by himself his mind keeps on wandering back to the night where he fought Tommy.

Dream explicitly told Ranboo he was a tool and that he was using him. Yet he still gave him the title of apprentice. But the question that kept coming up was *why* Dream wanted Tommy as an apprentice so bad. If he wanted just any apprentice that he would have power over then he would've considered taking back Ranboo. No, when Tommy was his apprentice before Dream only wanted Tommy for his ability to open portals. Then after Tommy rebelled, Dream enlisted Ranboo who could use his abilities to track Tommy because he was volatile. Dream had a reason for everything he did.

So why did Dream make Tommy his apprentice if not to use him for his powers again? But why would Dream want to open more portals? Especially since Tommy can't control his powers when doing so? Dream wouldn't be that reckless.

Then Ranboo remembers what Tommy said about 404. 404, Dream's closest friend, had gone missing last year and Dream started to act differently towards Tommy after that. Ranboo starts to consider the possibility that 404's disappearance has to do with Tommy. He connects the dots and comes to the theory that Tommy somehow is being blackmailed to stay with Dream.

So after this we would finally come back to a Tommy pov.

We would go back in time to when Tommy first wakes up after his rampage. He is in a room that he recognizes instantly as one of the rooms where Dream used to make him open portals. Obviously he freaks out and tries to escape but he figures out that he is wearing power suppressing cuffs. They are more advanced than the ones that they made Tubbo wear. Then Dream's voice comes over a speaker.

Tommy yells at him to tell him where he is and what he did to him. Dream waits for Tommy to run out of steam before he reveals to him that he's here to keep him from destroying the city. Tommy thinks Dream is lying until Dream shows him a broadcast. As Tommy watches in horror, Dream goes on about how Tommy was so uncontrollable that he almost killed his friends in the process. Tommy is devastated at the fact that he couldn't protect the people he cared the most about. Dream then explains that the only person who can help him control his powers is Dream since Dream is able to temporarily remove his powers.

Tommy initially has the motivation to argue with Dream. He doesn't believe that locking him up and only working with Dream will help him. He threatens Dream saying that he will

simply break out with or without his powers.

Dream then reminds Tommy that he will do anything to protect this city. If Tommy doesn't follow his instructions and do exactly what he says then he will kill his friends. Tommy tries to counter for a bit, but it is quickly snuffed out as Dream reveals that he's basically tracking all his friends. Dream has hidden cameras like at the school and the bookshop or something (idk lol).

This revelation breaks Tommy's spirit. There's a bit of time where Tommy sulks about the fact he basically became he's living in his worst nightmare. During this time the only person he can talk to is Dream and Dream is being nice to him which is making Tommy resent himself even more because he likes the attention he's getting from his old mentor.

Then finally one day Dream comes into the room with a suit and tells him that Tommy will be his apprentice again. Tommy rejects the idea at first since he doesn't want to use his powers at all, but Dream then reminds him about the last time Tommy suppressed his powers. Dream suggests this method because it solves a bunch of problems. It will allow Tommy to use his powers in a controlled environment with Dream watching over him and it will make his friends stop looking for him.

Tommy questions the plan because he wonders about the fact that if his friends are looking for him why wouldn't they chase him even if he was working for Dream. Then Dream tells him if he ever gets into the situation where his friends chase him, then Tommy needs to convince them that he doesn't want to be saved. Dream orders Tommy to make his friends give up on him and make them think he's a lost cause.

During the time where Tommy trains with Dream, Dream pushes Tommy to learn how to control the part of himself that craves power. Tommy basically learns about the signs if he is about to lose control and reign it in.

Then we cut to the night where the rest of the gang ambushes Tommy. We get the scenes from Tommy's point of view instead of Ranboo's. We see that Tommy is lying through his teeth and he hates how he's treating his friends. The entire time Dream is in his ear, encouraging what Tommy says.

He particularly has a bad time when Dream belittles Ranboo. His heart breaks as he sees Ranboo try to sacrifice himself for Tommy and it fails. The last thing he wants to do is leave his friend, but he also knows the consequences if he does so.

When they return back to the laboratory which is under the hero tower (or whatever it is called lol), Dream informs that he believes Tommy is ready to open another portal. Tommy questions why Dream even wants to open another portal since it went so horribly the first time. Dream then explains to Tommy that he believes 404 is still alive. Dream claims he's been receiving messages from 404 [like in his dreams or something I wasn't completely sure about this yet].

Tommy realizes this guy is completely crazy, but he has no choice but to follow him because his friends are in danger. So the next few days Tommy tries to open portals, but slightly has a

mental block and keeps on failing. At this time, Dream also makes some sort of contraption to get Tommy to create a specific portal to 404 [some random science stuff idk lol].

So Tommy is failing to make a portal even though Dream has made it so they have the perfect conditions to made a portal to 404.

[idk but i feel like this scene is happening on the top floor of the hero tower IDK WHY its just what I'm imagining LOL]

Then suddenly Ranboo, W, Phil, and Techno crash in and they all fight for a bit.

[During this time I think I would have ranboo fight Dream a bit so we can have so ranboo resolution cuz damn i made his story so sad]

But then there's a bit of a stalemate as Dream breaks Phil wing (again omg lol) and then dangles him off the building. He demands that Tommy opens a portal. So Tommy opens a portal the way Dream wants him to and Tommy is surprised he is able to stay sane during it (his training worked lol).

So once the portal is open, everyone is surprised when 404 comes out of the portal. However, everyone very quickly learns that it is not actually 404 when Dream tries to greet him, 404 throws him off the building (lol or something idk)

The gang learns that the 404 is being possessed by a god-like being called XD. XD notices that Tommy is the one that can open portals and XD wants to take over all dimensions. He claims that he wants to possess Tommy. The gang runs away and basically hides as XD starts terrorizing the city.

There's a scene where Tommy is blaming himself again and he feels awful, but through the power of friendship, his friends help build up his confidence. They make a plan luring XD back to the portal and then Tommy would close the portal. At this time he would change back to his original red hoodie and mask. Ya know, symbolic stuff lol.

So they have Techno and W distract XD while Ranboo, Tubbo, and Tommy go back to the tower. At this time there are a bunch of heroes fighting XD but it is clear that XD is kind of overpowered. Ya know its big fight vibes and everyone is there fighting and stuff.

However, their plan fails and XD basically beats everyone up and it seems like they're going to lose. Tommy is about to be possessed by XD when Dream comes back and basically uses Tommy's powers to send XD into the portal.

Tommy tries to close the portal, but XD is stopping them and keeping it open despite Dream forcing him in. They realize someone has to go in after XD and force him down while Tommy closes the portal. Ranboo or W offer to sacrifice themselves, but in the end Dream pushes them both out of the way and claims the spot. Tommy is shocked that he would be so selfless but Dream makes him promise that Dream will get the credit of being the hero of the city if he does it. That seems more on brand. Tommy accepts his deal and then Dream goes through the portal. Tommy closes it and the chaos is over.

We would have a few final scenes as the city gets rebuilt and how things got resolved. When the news asks him about what happened during the final fight, Tommy tells them that his friends and him were the only ones to close the portal with no help from anyone else (basically a big F U to Dream). The hero council goes to Tommy, Ranboo, W, Techno, Phil, and Tubbo and offers them all jobs as heroes but they all reject their offer. The hero council claims if they are ever caught then they will be arrested and the gang laughs them off. As if they could be caught by any of their heroes.

And then the story would probably end with some fluff about how they all lived happily ever after. And Tommy would finally be able to finish his deez nuts joke.

And that's it! I'm going to be honest I gave y'all so much more than even I expected. I didn't realize I would write so many scenes but alas when I start going I can't stop. Y'all know how much I love dialogue lolol.

Anyway! Thank you so much for reading this far if you're here! I'm so blessed to have so many people invested in my silly little story.

Please, as you go on, know that your voice matters no matter who you are. It's our job to fight for those who can't. We all have the chance to help, even if it is in a small way. Keep fighting for Palestine, Sudan, Congo, and Ukraine. Keep fighting until all people are free from oppression and genocide. We all have the right to live in a place of peace and without fear if we will live to see the next day.

I wish you a wonderful day and if you'd like to keep up with my writing journey or my art journey I'm pretty active on instagram and tiktok even if I'm not posting that much art haha. Hopefully I'll be more active in the upcoming months!

Thank you for reading my silly words and ignoring all my spelling mistakes <3

it's time

Hey y'all its time to say goodbye to this fic I'll be deleting it in the next day or so

Thank you for reading <3

if you'd like a google doc link here it is: [Google Doc Pdf](#)

or copy and paste this lol: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F0ta_YVm9-RjfyDhyUK2gbo-MFa8YGff/view?usp=drive_link

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